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ETERNAL KNIGHT

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SCOTT FRAZIER

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Ever dream of chucking it all and moving to Japan to start a career in anime? **L. Jagi Lamplighter** talks to the man who did.

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Kevin Altieri's adaptation of the popular comic remains a no-show on video shelves. While we're waiting, **David Evans** takes a look at the process by which three disaffected super-teens become anime stars.



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Some fans cut their first anime teeth on this classic '70s adventure series. **Andrew Osmond** looks back to a time when space heroes dressed like birds, 7-Zark-7 chirruped incessantly, and nobody ever, *ever* died.



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Publisher: Frederick S. Clarke. **Editor:** Dan Persons. **Tokyo Bureau:** Hiroki Kakihsa. No **Contributors** were harmed in the making of this magazine: Dan Cziraky, David Evans, Marina Frants, Todd French, Russell J. Handelman, David Hughes, L. Jagi Lamplighter, Eric Lurio, Mike Lyons, Scott C. Mauriello, Daisuke Miyao, Michael O'Connell, Andrew Osmond, Dan Scapperotti. **Editorial Operations Manager:** Elaine Fiedler. **Editorial Production:** Lisa Tomczak-Walkington. **Publisher's Assistant:** Lisa Coduto. **Circulation:** Faith Redding. **Business Manager:** Celeste Casey Clarke.

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ANIMEFANTASTIQUE (ISSN 1521-7205) is published quarterly at 7240 W. Roosevelt Rd., Forest Park, IL 60130. (708) 366-5566. E-mail: mail@cfq.com. Second class postage paid at Forest Park, IL 60130 & additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to **ANIMEFANTASTIQUE**, P.O. Box 270, Oak Park, IL 60303. **Subscriptions:** 4 Issues \$20. (Foreign & Canada: 4 Issues \$23 Single copies: \$8. **Retail Distribution:** In the U.S. by Eastern News Distributors, 250 W. 55th St., New York, NY 10019. (800) 221-3148. **Submissions** of artwork and articles are encouraged, but must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Contents copyright ©1999 by Frederick S. Clarke. **ANIMEFANTASTIQUE** TM is a proprietary U.S. Trademark. **PRINTED IN THE USA** by contented patriots.



And so the grand parade of last-minute marketing decisions moves ever onward, dazzling onlookers with its unpredictability and screwing the Hell out of dyspeptic magazine editors.

If you've taken a moment to appreciate this issue's cover—and how could you not?—you've probably come to the conclusion that we either jumped the gun grievously in showcasing a film that isn't due to open for another four months, or that we decided to qualify for the *Guinness Book of World Records* by publishing what has to be the world's longest preview article. Wrong on both counts. Actually, when we were putting this issue together, it was with the firm knowledge that Miramax would be opening *PRINCESS MONONOKE* on July 9th in New York and Los Angeles, as had been announced in a widely distributed press release. It was only after we'd put the fruit of our efforts to bed that Miramax changed its mind, bumping the release date to October 29th and instantly turning this issue, originally intended to capitalize on the arrival of an eagerly awaited film, into... well... into something that's *really* going to whet your appetite for this Fall.

And you know what? I couldn't be happier. Yeah, the time slippage puts the kibosh on our well-laid plans, but to

be honest, I was never really comfortable with that July date. I mean, c'mon, visually lush, textually complex *MONONOKE* in July? In the thick of the summer market, on a severely restricted platform? It smelled of token treatment, the kind of thing that gets done to fulfill a contractual obligation or to affix some sort of theatrical cachet to a film prior to its inevitable video release. And *MONONOKE* deserves more. It deserves to be seen by as many people as possible—ideally on as large a screen, with as fine a projection system and as sophisticated an audio rig, as can be mustered. Quite frankly, it deserves the auditoriums that are currently being monopolized by George Lucas' little home-movie (auditoriums that, for all I know, may still be so occupied by the end of October).

We probably won't be quite that lucky—those theaters are earmarked for high-profile, Hollywood product—but since Miramax now states that they've expanded the film's initial platform to "twenty major markets," there's at least a better chance that *MONONOKE* will get to more of the people who wish to experience it on a big screen. This now begins to look like a legitimate release—a little conservative perhaps, but still holding out

the promise that the film will go wider if the boxoffice supports it. Whatever forces, aesthetic or commercial, compelled Miramax to make the schedule change (and how much do you want to bet that part of the impetus came from some honcho at Disney—Miramax's parent company—realizing that the not-dissimilar *TARZAN* would be opening a scant few weeks prior to that July 9th date?), it can't be denied that this is far and away a more preferable treatment for this landmark, anime achievement.

Miramax, of course, is quick to point out that nothing is set in stone (as if, at this late date, we need to be told). But if the October date holds, I for one have no objection to sacrificing a cover for the cause.

SPELLCHECK ANYONE?

Just for the record, Scott Frazier's name is misspelled in the caption on page 9, and Hayao Miyazaki gets the same, unfortunate treatment on page 28. Sorry guys, just sorta slipped through the cracks—that's what comes of putting together layouts while subsisting solely on a diet of Surge and White Castles.

Dan Persons
AFQEditor@aol.com

AFQ



BREAK WITH THE PAST: THE FIFTIES IS THE FUTURE FOR WARNERS' IRON GIANT

MIKE
LYONS

THE QUEST FOR CAMELOT was a blow to the solar plexus that Warner Bros. Feature Animation is still reeling from. Worse than the film's poor performance at the box-office was the fact that critics and audiences felt the film was derivative of everything that had already become stale about animation.

Later this year, Warners will unveil **THE IRON GIANT**, which will be something altogether different for feature animation...they promise. "IRON GIANT, I think, is the first movie in a long time that does not stick to the formula," says the film's producer, Allison Abbate, who served the same role for Warner's hit, **SPACE JAM**. "We all have a unified vision and a really strong story."

Based on *The Iron Man*, by the late Poet Laureate Ted Hughes, **THE IRON GIANT** centers on a young boy named Hogarth Hughes and what happens to his small town after he finds a 50-foot-tall robot in his backyard.

The film will feature the voice talents of **FRIENDS'** Jennifer Aniston as Annie, Hogarth's mother; Harry Connick, Jr. as Dean, the beatnik who befriends Hogarth; Christopher McDonald (**FLUBBER**) as the villainous government agent, Kent; young actor Eli Marienthal as Hogarth; and Vin Diesel (**SAVING PRIVATE RYAN**) as the Giant. Also lending their talents: John Mahoney, Cloris Leachman and M.

Emmet Walsh.

In 1989, The Who's Pete Townsend and Des Macanuff created a musical, of sorts, out of Hughes' story with their CD, *The Iron Man*. The two later pitched the idea to Warner Bros as an animated feature film. It was when animation veteran Brad Bird (most famous for his work on **THE SIMPSONS** and the **FAMILY DOG** episode of **AMAZING STORIES**) came aboard that the studio began to see the animated possibilities. "He took it and did his own treatment of it," noted Abbate of Bird's involvement. "He basically updated it and fleshed it out more. The story is very poetic and very ethereal. It's a beautiful story, but Brad put more detail into it. The nice thing about it is that we have completely captured the spirit and the heart of the book."

One of the changes made by Bird — who would go on to direct the film — was to alter the setting from Eng-

land to a small town in Maine, during the fifties. Abbate noted that, despite this change, one of the mandates was that **IRON GIANT** couldn't become "trapped" in the decade. "We really tried not to make it about sock hops and *Rock Around the Clock*. We needed this time of innocence. We didn't want it to be set in present day, because everyone would have laptop computers and video games. It's a moment when the world was on the verge of a technological revolution, but hasn't gotten there yet."

Abbate also noted that the setting allowed them to reflect society's attitude at the time. "The really great thing about the story is that, because we've set it in the fifties, we've been able to set it against this very paranoid time. Basically, when the Giant arrives in town, everyone reacts differently. Some people are afraid, they think he's a monster and the

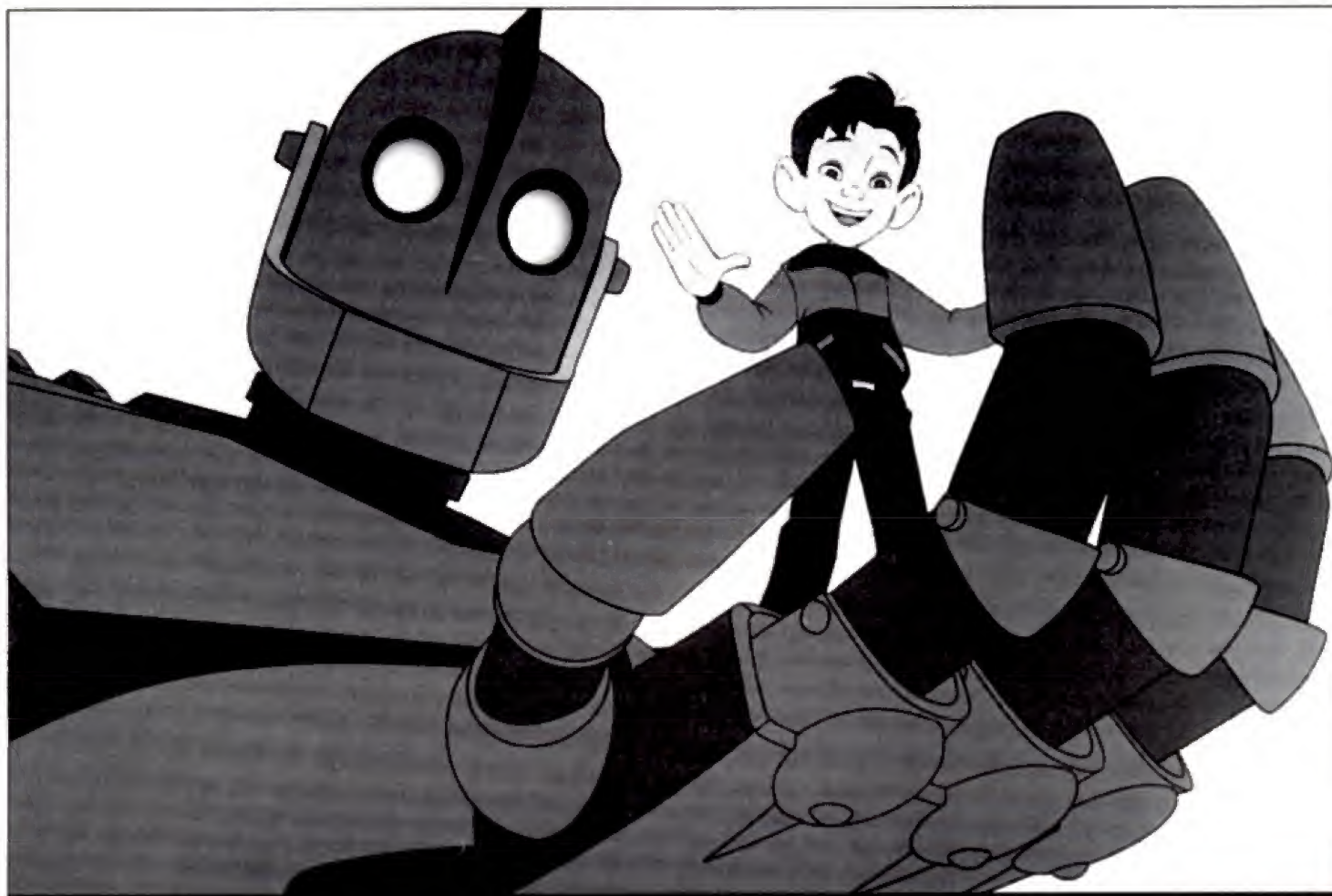
government thinks it's a weapon."

To establish this mood, **IRON GIANT** opens with an image of Sputnik circling the Earth, but as the story settles into the small town, an aura of innocence takes over, which is mirrored in the film's look and tone. Among the inspirations for the art directors were such artists as N.C. Wyeth and Norman Rockwell. In addition, a pre-production excursion to locations in Maine was arranged for the crew of **IRON GI-**

ANT, so that they could soak up the unique ambiance of the state. "Maine is such a graphic place," said Abbate. "There are a lot of verticals and horizontals. We really played with varying degrees of detail and making environments where the characters could 'live' in terms of color and graphics."

With its own unique touches, strong storytelling and dynamic visual design, **IRON GIANT** may indeed go a long way in repairing some of the potholes left in **QUEST FOR CAMELOT's** wake. More importantly, the film may also continue to open up the possibilities of the medium, possibilities that Warners, the birthplace of Looney Tunes, has of late ignored. "The resurgence in animation is good because you're going to get all kinds of movies," said Abbate. "There's not just one kind of animated movie and that's where I hope the industry is going."

AFQ



METAL MASTER: Having come a-cropper in its attempt to challenge Disney on its own turf, Warners takes a new tack with the distinctive fantasy **THE IRON GIANT**.

BEYOND REAL: THE AVATAR CONUNDRUM

ERIC
LURIO

A couple of years back, James Cameron, director of *TITANIC*, let it slip that he was going to follow his sinking ship epic with an SF feature called *AVATAR*. Hard details were impossible to get, but the rumors indicated that it would be a completely computer-generated, animated film. The gimmick was that we weren't supposed to know that until sometime in the middle of the flick.

AVATAR as a project is long dead. Some tests were done and it was decided that it would cost more than *TITANIC* to make. But the problem the project presented is still there, and the thought of it sent shudders throughout Hollywood. The idea of virtual actors taking over from real ones still drives the Screen Extra's Guild nuts. After all, Cameron had, in fact, used virtual actors in *TITANIC*.

Clearly the line between what we traditionally consider animation and what we traditionally consider special effects is blurring. The *AVATAR* conundrum is this: are the growing number of CGI features coming out in the next few years animation or special effects?

Which brings us to PentaFour Software & Exports Ltd. (PSEL) of Bangalore, India, and its digital extravaganza, *SINBAD: BEYOND THE VEILS OF MISTS*. *SINBAD* is the ultimate in special effects. Real actors run around real (albeit wire mesh) sets and are photographed by real cameras. Then it goes into digital post production, like those blue screen shots in most SF and fantasy films we all know and love. Except more so: this is one giant blue

screen shot — eventually nothing of the original acting is left but the movements of the digitally rotoscoped characters.

The movie takes place in a mythical kingdom by the sea. We meet Princess Serena (voice of Jennifer Hale) walking by the shore where she comes across Baraka (voice of Leonard Nimoy), who seems to have survived a shipwreck and is badly in need of food and water. She takes him back to the palace, where Baraka is introduced to good King Akron (also Leonard Nimoy), who is Serena's father. But Baraka isn't just a poor shipwreck survivor. No, he's an evil wizard who was exiled from a magical, undersea kingdom.

Baraka uses his magic powers to switch identities with King Akron and throws him in the dungeon. Poor Serena discovers the truth and hires Sinbad the Sailor (voice of Brendan Fraser) to go with her to the end of the world, where, "beyond the veils of mists," they can get the ingredients for the anti-

dote. The film is billed as the first "100% motion capture" feature.

To understand what motion capture is, think of a computer mouse. You move it and the arrow on the screen moves. The technology is quite a bit more complicated, but the concept's the same. A veritable herd of mice, in the form of special suits, or in this case reflectors and infrared cameras, are used to download the real movements of performers into the hard drives of the company in question.

Variations on this technique are used in video games all the time. Just look at the trailers for *LEGEND OF ZELDA* and you'll understand what it's all about. *SINBAD*, of course, will look ten thousand times less crude than the *ZELDA* trailer, but from the stills that have been made public, it still has the look and feel of a video game.

By the time this comes out, you will have already seen *THE PHANTOM MENACE*. From all reports at the

time of writing (early February), TPM will have as much animation as either *SPACE JAM* or *WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT*. The special effects in Warners' remake of *THE INCREDIBLE MR. LIMPET* are supposed to take over most of the film, and Universal's *FRANKENSTEIN AND THE WOLF-MAN* is reported to be 100% CGI. The film is being made by Industrial Light and Magic, the top effects house in Hollywood. Is *FRANKENSTEIN* an animated film or the ultimate in special effects? The *AVATAR* conundrum rears its ugly head.

Another project that begs the *AVATAR* question is Disney's extraordinarily expensive *DINOSAUR*. Reports as to the plot indicate that it's the story of the last dinosaur and some lemurs during the aftermath of the big meteor. You're not supposed to know that it's animated, although it *has* to be. Reports from those who have seen clips say that the animation is amazing. The few reports on the script — and I've only gotten these third hand — aren't that good. But we'll have to see.

Clearly, technology has reached the point where we're about to hit a semantic wall. While traditional-looking animated films slot comfortably into their category, it may not be the same for CGI. *TOY STORY*s 1 & 2 are clearly animation, as are *ANTZ* and *A BUG'S LIFE*. *FRANKENSTEIN* and *DINOSAUR* may not be. Where *SINBAD* is, is uncertain. Probably just on the cusp.

All we can say for sure is that, whatever happens, both the films and the discussions they engender are going to be very interesting, indeed. AFQ

FUTURE PREHISTORY: The actors, monsters, and settings exist nowhere but in the bowels of a computer. But is *SINBAD: BEYOND THE VEILS OF MISTS* the ultimate in animation, or the world's longest special effect?



LORE AND ORDER: SHINTO IN ANIME (PART I)

RUSSELL J.
HANDELMAN

Heads bowed and hands pressed together, a father and two daughters offer reverence to an enormous camphor-tree...a raven-haired young woman in a white blouse and scarlet skirt waves a wand of braided paper before an altar...morsels of food rest on a shelf in a typical Japanese home in front of what looks like a tiny doll's house...

The practices and beliefs of Shinto pervade anime, just as they do everyday life in Japan, yet Shinto remains little understood by Western viewers. The chief difficulty lies in that Shinto may appear to lack that which Westerners have been accustomed to think of as prerequisites for religion. Shinto has no great prophet, and although there is a liturgy of traditional Shinto prayers, there is no sacred text filling the same purpose as the Torah, the New Testament or the Koran. Even its name, "Shinto," is non-native and said to have been coined by early Chinese Buddhist missionaries, who needed something to call the indigenous beliefs they encountered.

A further complication to understanding Shinto is the question of just who or what is being worshiped. The word *kami* is most often translated in anime as "God" or "Gods," which severely limits the depth of meaning that the term actually possesses. It could be said to refer to a sense of the sacred or spiritual energy that pervades places, objects, figures of mythology or spirits of nature. Even humans, being remotely descended from mythological deities, are felt to have a *kami*-nature.

Shinto worship is centered around a *jinja*, or shrine. The shrine is not a "house of worship" for the

benefit of the adherents, but rather a place imbued with a particular *kami*. The word itself literally means "*kami*-home." Although shrine architecture and surrounding landscaping differ throughout Japan, certain features are generic to virtually all shrines.

The shrine entrance is marked by a *torii*, a gateway consisting of at least two uprights and a crossbar, signifying the separation of the site sacred to the *kami*. Along the path to the shrine there will be a source of running water for the performance of *temizu*, a form of

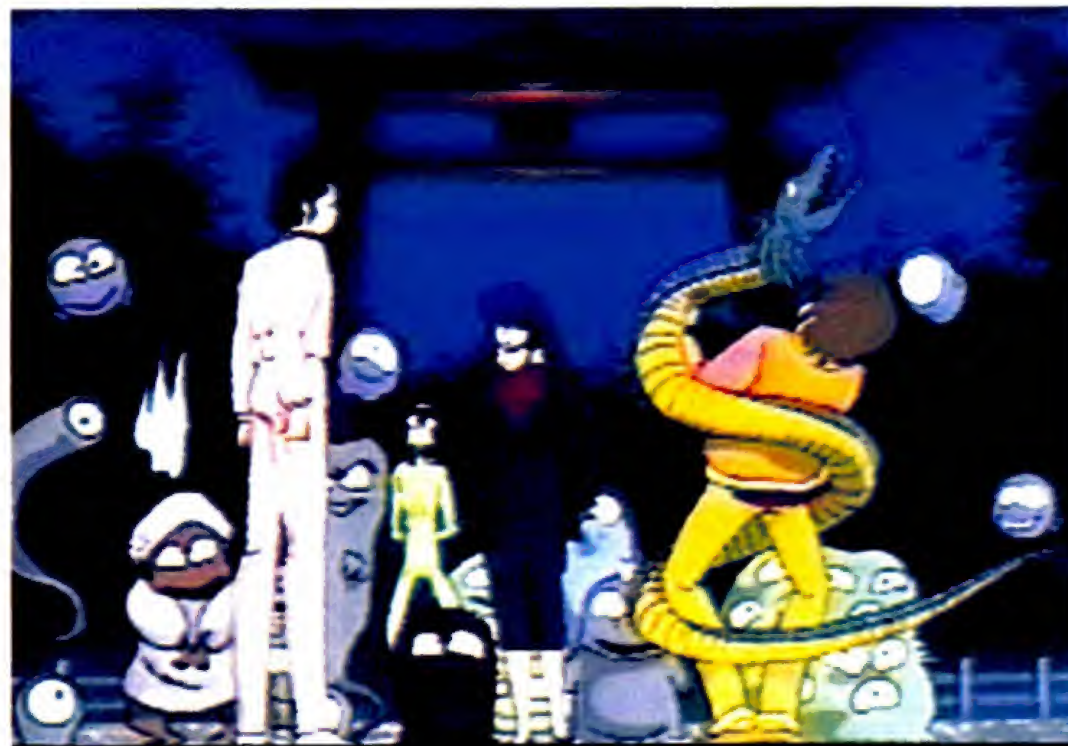
sealed, contains the *shintai* ("*kami*-body"), some actual object in which the *kami* resides. After prayer, the worshipper leaves some form of tribute, and some particular favor to be asked of the *kami* may be written onto an *ema*, a small wooden tablet, and hung on a frame set up for that purpose. Before leaving the shrine grounds, the worshipper may also purchase an amulet for good luck or for protection, most often packaged in a tiny brocaded bag. Shaking a box of numbered sticks, the worshipper may choose a numbered, paper fortune. If favorable, it is

shrine worship according to their needs. Some perform rites once a day, or only at certain festivals, or at *kami-dana*, tiny shrines set on shelves of their own homes and dedicated to *kami* that may have an especial importance to the family or the community.

Despite emphasis on individual worship, Shinto does have clergy, male and female, who perform rites and ceremonies. Male priests perform many of these functions, with young female attendants, or *miko*, assisting them.

The purpose of worship is to achieve purification, to express gratitude to the *kami* and to try to live according to the will of the *kami*. Since the *kami*-nature pervades one's surroundings, the knowledge of what is right and good is to be found within oneself. What troubles in life or wrongdoing that may occur are more a matter of misguidedness, rather than a Western sense of "sinfulness" or "evil." There are no "evil" *kami*; rather, *kami* are said to have a "rough" nature and can behave unpredictably in response to a lack of proper veneration by worshippers. Even the deities of Shinto mythology are often seen as exhibiting such human characteristics as jealousy, petulance and vengeance. Shinto observance could be said to be as much as an aid to helping the *kami* remain in harmony with the rest of the world as in helping the worshipper to remain in harmony with the *kami*.

That's just the barest bones of a religion with tremendous depth and significance for its followers. What does it have to do with anime? More than you may realize. But that's something we'll have to discover in the next installment. AFQ



THE SPIRITS ARE WILLING: The Shinto philosophy of *kami* can power anime plotlines in surprising ways, such as with the ceremony celebrating the removal of an ancient cherry tree that's the main plot device of URUSEI YATSURA: LUM THE FOREVER.

ritual purification. The worshipper stands outside the shrine, but does not actually enter it, as the space within is reserved for the *kami*. Pulling on a braided rope, the worshipper rings a bell to alert the *kami*, then claps hands, bows the head, and offers some personal prayer. Within the shrine can be seen *gohei*, strips of braided rice paper on stands representing ritual offerings. Deeper within the shrine, a small chest or cabinet, kept

kept, if not, it is twisted around a rack or onto the branches of a sakaki tree as a means of "losing" the unfavorable divination. The shrine grounds, even in densely populated, urban areas, will be landscaped in some way, with trees marked off with *shimenawa*, thick, braided rope usually decorated with *gohei*, identifying them as *shinboku*, sacred trees that may be *shintai*.

As Shinto does not have a Sabbath, people observe

Scott

What do courage, tenacity,
and a willingness to tackle
any job available get an
American in Japan?

How about into some of
the most influential
animation houses
in the world.



Many anime fans dream of becoming animators. Few actually leave their native country and move to Japan to pursue their dream. One who did is the American animator/director/producer Scott Frazier. Scott has worked with such popular titles as *MOLDDIVER*, *GENOCYBER*, *BUBBLEGUM CRASH*, and the less-well-known-in-America *RAIGER*. The going, though, was not always easy. Scott found himself face to face with poverty, obscurity, and even the Chinese Army before he succeeded in break-

by L. JAGI

LAMPLIGHTER

ing into the industry he dreamed of joining.

Scott was born in 1965 in Pomona, California, but spent most of his pre-anime life in Denver, Colorado. He loved animation, even as a small child: "Even then, I was drawn to drama shows like *JOHNNY QUEST* more than slapstick/cartoon shows like *TOM & JERRY*, so I suppose that I was leaning towards what anime had to offer from the beginning."

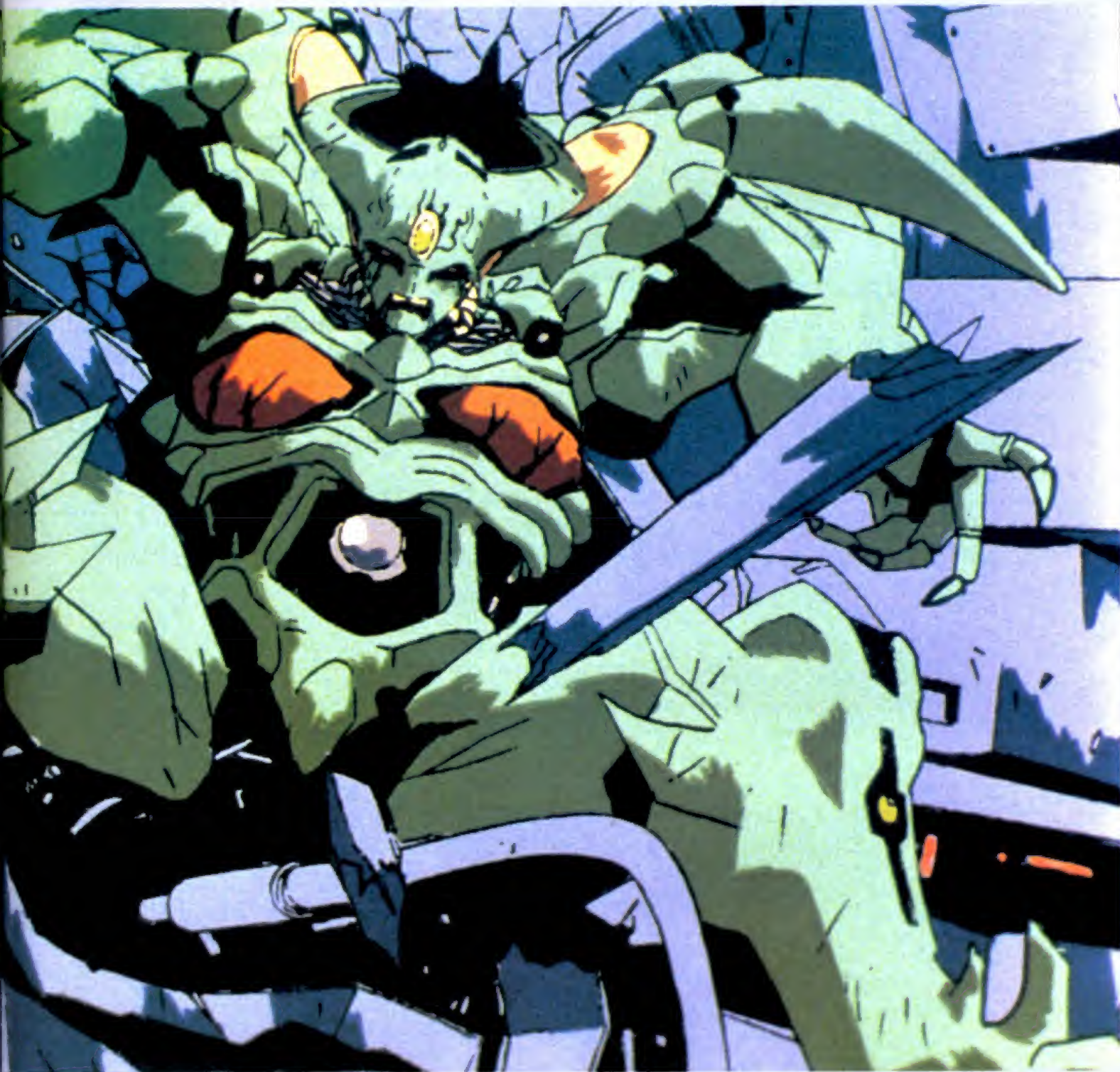
It was *BATTLE OF THE PLANETS* (*GATCHAMAN*) — caught on TV mornings before leaving for high school — that first attracted Frazier to Japanese animation. Then, a friend of a friend introduced him to anime

straight from Japan, and Scott was hooked.

"In 1985, I got the crazy idea that I wanted to do this as a job, and that I wanted to do it in Japan. I found an animation school that would accept me and moved over. After a few years of starvation and incessant agony, I finally landed a job in the industry and just kept on going."

Arriving in Japan, Scott studied at the International Animation Institute (*Kokusai Animeshon Kenkyuujyo* — since then, this institute has been swallowed by the Yoyogi Animation School.) He knew only a little Japanese, so in addition to studying animation, he had to attend a language school just

Frasier



PEN AND INK PASSPORT: Frasier's TAO studio generated the art for such groundbreaking efforts as GENOCYBER.

to understand his lessons.

"I enrolled in a language school in Tokyo before I left the U.S," he explained. "I started going there the day after I arrived. The first six months were *very* difficult. There was just no English language help available anywhere at that time, and I was able to communicate only in Japanese with the people I worked and studied with and lived around. It did force me to learn the language a lot faster than if I'd had an easier lifestyle!"

Scott had no animation experience when he set out on his new adventure. He said, "I liked to draw, and copied as much anime-related artwork as I could find. I fig-

ured out how cels were made, and painted some for fun. I had only the roughest idea of how animation really worked. It was quite a leap from what I was doing as a fan to what I finally ended up doing as a pro."

Struggling to make ends meet, Scott took any job that would keep him near the anime industry. He worked with camera and cels, as an in-between, did some key animation, taught animation, and worked in production departments. As he put it, "...anything to make money. This is not to say make ends meet, unfortunately. I got deep into debt, most of which I wouldn't have been able to ever pay back if I had not

happened to enter the more lucrative computer end of things. That allowed me to survive until I could get directing work."

Did he ever lose heart? Scott admitted there were periods when it was hard to continue. He said, "There were times when I thought about giving up and teaching English, or even bailing out back to the States. But, it always came back to the same thing: I went this far, and it would be easier to go the rest of the way than to try and go back. There was no 'back;' nothing saved up for a return trip. Like Columbus when he reached the new world, I burned my ships and set my sights on the future."

His first anime job was at Visual 80, a studio producing *SPIRAL ZONE* for U.S. TV. Scott worked with the foreign director of *ZONE*, checking the shows for problems. The cel department was subcontracting *ORANGE ROAD* episodes, and Scott had the opportunity to paint some *ORANGE ROAD* cels for episodes 12 or 13. He explained, "Most of what I did there was hang around and try to learn how the whole process worked. Once, though, when the director was out of the country, I discovered that I was much better at directing than at drawing the animation itself. The staff encouraged me to try and study directing more."

Due to various difficulties, Scott never worked full-time at Visual. It was not until over a year and a half later that he got a real paying job in the industry. His first paid anime job was in 1989, as a cel painter and courier to China for a studio called Top Gun.

His period as a courier to China came to an abrupt end after Scott experienced what he called "a disastrous encounter with the Chinese Army," on the day of the Tiananmen Square incident. Though not in the square himself, he was close enough to be in great danger. He said of this experience, "I came very close to taking some bullets in

Nanjing. Scary day.”

Returning to Japan, Scott left Top Gun to work in the production department at Artland, where he worked as production coordinator. During his time there he also taught at other companies throughout Asia, culminating in opening KAB, a joint venture between Kitty Film, Artland and a Thai computer company in Bangkok, Thailand.

In 1991 he opened his own studio in Bangkok — TAO, which produced cels, in-betweens, and backgrounds for shows such as *MOLDDIVER*, *GENOCYBER*, *SWAT KATS*, and *DIARY OF MIKAN*. Scott described the experience, “I loved working in Thailand. It was the perfect time to be there, and I had the best staff anyone could ever want. Unfortunately, a few years later, the recession hit Japan, and the anime industry, as well as TAO, was devastated by it.”

In 1994, after closing TAO, he went to work with Cambridge Animation Systems as a production consultant helping studios change over to digital production using Animo, a 2D, computer-assisted animation sys-

tem. Eventually, he ended up as a producer at Production IG and the president of Production IG, Inc. (USA), where he worked for about two years. He said, “At first the company was doing the *GHOST IN THE SHELL* movie and was just starting out doing digital-based production. I worked on *Madou Monogatari*, *Grandstream*, and *Kyoushin Senki* (all game animation), *PANZER DRAGOON* (OVA) and now on the new feature they’re working on, *BLOOD*.”



In 1996, Scott made his manga debut with *TRANSCENDENCE*, a digital, graphic novel published in *Comic ON*. Of this experience, Scott mused, “I could never do manga as my main job. That’s a very hard life.”

One of the perks of Scott’s work is that from time to time he gets to meet the creative minds whose work makes the anime we all know and love possible. “I’ve met a lot of different

anime people, some very popular and famous,” Scott explained. “A lot of them were really great artists and wonderful people. I’m not really much of a celebrity-seeker, and I’ve never asked for an autograph or sketch or anything, so I tend to see them as just people I’m working with [or for] rather than as stars. That said, there are people whom I found particularly enriching to work with, like Mamoru Oshii, Toshihiko Nishikubo, Noboru Ishiguro and Izumi Matsumoto.” Scott admitted to also having met Hayao Miyazaki, but only very briefly. “He wouldn’t remember me,” he said.

Scott continues to consult for Cambridge Animation Systems, helping studios make the jump from cel painting to digital animation. How does the Animo system differ from traditional animation? Explained Scott, “Digital animation is not really that different at the beginning. The storyboards, layout and animation are all done just like they have been forever. The images are scanned in much like you would put them through a trace machine or copier. They are then colored (“painted”), and put together with the backgrounds and other elements [composited].”

However, computer animation offers a number of advantages which makes it quite appealing to anime studios. “The job is much nicer than doing cels,” said Scott, “as there is no more paint to run out of or to spill, no cels to scratch and try to find storage space for, no trace carbons or benzene fumes anymore. There is no retake that can’t be done quickly and cleanly. We also have an unlimited palette and don’t have to worry about having to keep 350 colors of paint in stock all the time.

“The biggest change in production is ac-



MAJOR MARKETS: Frazier’s peripatetic ways have led him to associations with an eclectic range of productions. Above and upper right: *PANZER DRAGOON*. Directly right: Cartoon Network mainstay *SWAT KATS*.



tually after the images have all been colored and composited. The director has a lot more control over the scenes with Animo than with a traditional camera. It's really great to work with a really good director who gets ahold of Animo and lets his creative powers loose."

Currently, through his own studio, Atelier Moonlight, Scott is working independently on a number of projects. "I'm in the planning stages for a 12-episode OVA series that I will be directing, and a TV series where I will be working as technical director on some episodes. Sorry, I can't name either one at this point. I am also doing pre-production work on AMP'D — an international release, feature film project that I will be directing. It's going to be a very innovative film — a fusion of hip-hop culture and music, cyberpunk style, and anime."

For fellow Americans who wish to come to Japan, Scott

warns that adjusting to life in Japan can be very difficult. For those still determined, he recommends taking a trip to the Kinokunia bookstores for books on such topics as insurance, food, driving and other details foreigners need to know. Also he provides some information about working in the anime industry on his web page at www.age.ne.jp/x/scott.

Overall, was it worth it to leave home and endure years of poverty and incessant agony? Scott replied with a resounding 'Yes!' In his own words:

"Looking back at the last 13 years makes me wonder: if I could wind time back, would I set myself on that course, knowing what was to come? I wouldn't trade a day of it. Although the kidney stones I could have done without. The heart failure thing would go. And the flukeman, too... I still have a long way to go to where I want to be but the best is yet to come." **AFQ**

FRUITFUL ASSOCIATIONS: Frazier treasures his long-term affiliation with Production IG, which has brought him into contact with such luminaries as GHOST IN THE SHELL director Mamoru Oshii.



STRONGER THAN AN INFLATED BUDGET: THE FLEISCHER'S SUPERMAN

DAN
SCAPPEROTTI

The sales figures were hardly dry on the new Superman comic books and daily newspaper strips when the Man of Steel was slated to hit the screen in one of the most unique cartoon series ever produced. Audiences familiar with a parade of talking animals in comical situations were about to be broadsided by a dramatic animated adventure series. Paramount Pictures secured the rights for a series of 17 cartoons. They approached the Fleischer brothers, who had been distributing Popeye shorts through the studio. Less than enthused over the prospect, Dave Fleischer decided it was wiser to quote the studio a suitably outrageous budget figure and snuff the project before it got started. The number he came up with was \$100,000. Paramount took one look at the figure, said, "Okay," and on September 26, 1941, the first short, simply titled *SUPERMAN* (now available on DVD from Image Entertainment) was released.

Foregoing the circle-and-oval look typical of animation in those days, *SUPERMAN*'s animators employed a deco-influenced series of blocks and wedges for their designs. Two animators created each of the cartoons; a total of 16 animators worked on the series, including Orestes Calpini, Steve Muffati, Myron Waldman, Graham Place and William Bowsky. Max and Dave Fleischer moved their operation to Florida, with Dave taking directing credit. When returns on their two animated features, *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS* and *HOPPITY GOES TO TOWN*, proved disappointing, Paramount showed their gratitude to the men who brought Koko the Clown, Betty Boop,

and Popeye to the screen by unceremoniously giving them the boot and absorbing their animation house into a new unit called Famous Studios.

No expense was spared in *SUPERMAN*'s production. Consequently, the Man of Steel's adventures are brilliant pieces of contemporary filmmaking, literally comic panels come to life. Across the series, the city of Metropolis is often ground-zero for no little mayhem: a wacky scientist invents a deadly "electrothenasia" ray in the first entry, *SUPERMAN*. Two months later a horde of killer robots descend on the hapless city in *THE MECHANICAL MONSTERS* (an episode Hiya Miyazaki would directly reference in the "Aloha Lupin!" episode of *LUPIN III*). The parallels between Metropolis and New York were further emphasized in *ELECTRIC EARTHQUAKE*, in which an avenging (albeit natty, business-suited) Indian threatens to destroy the city unless the island is returned to his people. (The mayor doesn't even

think of asking for the \$24 back.)

Through all of this, intrepid reporter Lois Lane, who sometimes does the *dumbest* things for a story, finds herself up to her neck in trouble, all while frequently demonstrating a complete lack of understanding of her precarious situations. In *SUPERMAN*, she attempts to get info on the mad scientist by simply walking up to the door of his hideout, ringing the bell, and announcing, "I'm a reporter." Next shot shows her tied and gagged. In *ELECTRONIC EARTHQUAKE*, she barely blinks when shackles spring from a booby-trapped chair. In *THE MECHANICAL MONSTERS*, she stows away in a giant, flying robot that has stolen a fortune in jewels. After Superman intervenes, losing the booty but failing to rescue the reporter before the automaton wings away, she is ruthlessly asked by the crooks, "What happened to the jewels?" "You'll read about it in tomorrow's paper," Lois answers, and casually begins to leave, only to

be taken prisoner. Maybe she was just into bondage.

With America's entry into World War II, Hollywood went on a war footing and Paramount sent their reigning superhero after the Axis powers. *JAPOTEURS* was the first cartoon to pit the comic strip character against the Japanese — not surprisingly, a set of buck-toothed, "So solly" caricatures similar to those often featured in domestic, wartime propaganda. Clark and Lois went undercover to trap a band of German saboteurs in *DESTRUCTION, INC.* In *THE ELEVENTH HOUR*, Lois and Clark somehow wind up in Yokohama, with Superman performing 11 o'clock guerilla runs on Japan's defense industry (it's okay for Supe to engage in sabotage, y'see — he's a *good guy*). The last Superman cartoon, *SECRET AGENT*, released on July 30, 1943, involved an American agent's attempts to get to Washington with a top secret list of enemy agents, and Superman's efforts to help her complete her mission. The film was notable for the absence of Lois Lane, whose role of comely prize was supplanted by the government operative.

Unique in the annals of cartoons, the Superman series is really the Fleischer brothers' crowning achievement. A daring attempt at dramatic, animated filmmaking during days better known for cutesy animals and scwewy wabbits, the series was a bold infusion of genuine (and often dialogue-free) action and vivid science fiction at a time when neither were recognized as significant genres. It has remained far more influential than the Fleischers' attempts to rival Disney in feature animation. **AFQ**

YOU MEAN YOU WANT IT TIGHTER?: Innovative minds elsewhere, the Fleischers could often only think of one thing to do with an assertive, female reporter. Supe once again pulls Lois' butt from the flames.



NEW USES FOR A BATHTUB: THE ROOTS OF ANIME

DAISUKE
MIYAO

Science fiction has always played a significant role in the history of anime. The very first TV anime series in Japan was of this genre, Osamu Tezuka's *ASTRO BOY* (1963). The three works that became social phenomena in Japan — Reiji Matsumoto's *SPACE CRUISER YAMATO* (1977), Yoshiyuki Tomino's *MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM* (1979), and Hideaki Anno's *NEON GENESIS EVANGELION* (1995) — are all genuine science fiction. The importance of science fiction in anime lies in the fact that it reflects the Japanese attitude toward science and technology, an outlook we cannot ignore when we talk about post-war Japanese history. Anime of the 1960s, such as *ASTRO BOY*, displayed an ambivalent view toward science and technology — incorporating both the optimism and the fear of the Japanese people after the atomic bombs of World War II. Astro Boy, “a son of science,” is a superhero who fights for world peace. At the same time, he poses a threat (especially when he breaks down), for as his original Japanese name, *TETSUWAN ATOM*, or “Mighty Atom,” suggests, Astro Boy draws his power from nuclear energy.

In the 1970s, Japan's high rate of economic growth opened the door to greater applications of science and technology — such as the growing use of electronics in everyday life. The ambivalence directed toward science and technology in '60s anime yielded to epic dramas featuring giant robots such as Go Nagai's *MAZINGER Z* (1972) and high-tech machines like *SPACE CRUISER YAMATO*. Since the 1980s, the limitations of science and technology have become widely recognized, and films such as *GUNDAM* and

EVANGELION have challenged their supremacy.

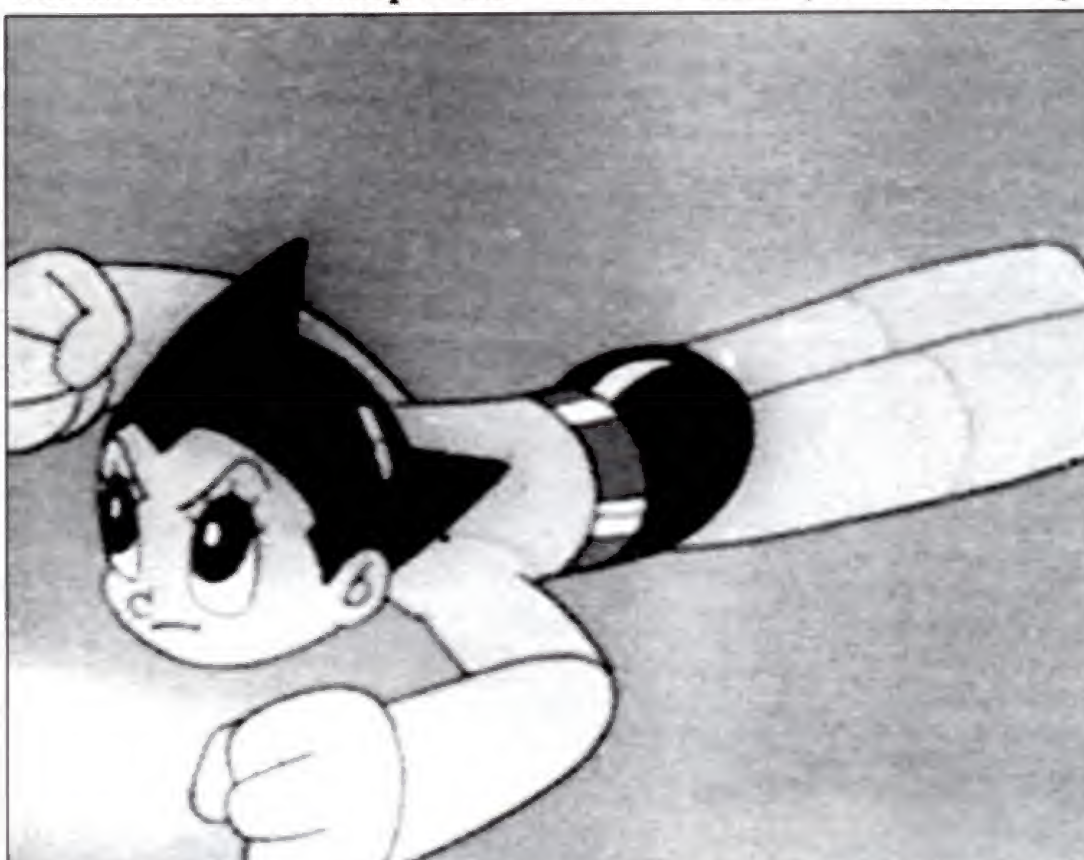
However, anime is not limited to science fiction. In fact, the history of science fiction anime in Japan, from *ASTRO BOY* on, is shorter than half the entire history of anime, which began in 1917. The first anime was *IMOKAWA KEIZO GENKAN BAN NO MAKI*, which was based on a popular manga and made by Oten Shimokawa, a cartoonist, at the Tenkatsu studio. Shimokawa's technique was

traditional Japanese paper with colored patterns — that Ofuji used to make his films. He followed this technique with shadow pictures. A prime example of this process, the 1927 film *WHALE*, was exported to the Soviet Union and France, along with Teinosuke Kinugasa's avant-garde film, *CROSSROADS* (1928). Both were well received.

These early anime were silent films, and in many

For early animators, educational institutions were among the major patrons. Educational institutions had begun to show instructional films at schools during the mid-1920s, and anime became a particular favorite of students. Educational institutions today still play important roles in providing financial support for anime.

In 1927, the first talkie animation, Walt Disney's *STEAMBOAT WILLIE*, was shown in Japan. Since then, the Disney style has been a major influence in the history of anime. For example, renowned film director Kon Ichikawa (*AN ACTOR'S REVENGE*) started his career in animation because he wanted to be the Disney of Japan. He was a student of painting and also interested in cinema. According to Ichikawa, *STEAMBOAT WILLIE* made him realize that animation was the perfect medium for him, because of its mixture of painting and cinema. His debut film was an anime called *SHINSETSU KACHIKACHI YAMA* (1936). Other early animators also set their sights on the Disney ideal. Unfortunately, what they didn't know was that Disney's cartoons were the products of an intensive group effort, produced in the factory-like environs of a big studio. Basically, early anime were products of household industry: one tiny house was divided into a drawing room, a camera room, and a screening room. Developing was done in the bathroom; workers were family members and their relatives. As we shall see in future columns, these tiny, near-personal production plants served as the birthplaces of a major, filmmaking industry. **AFQ**



KID POWERED: Osamu Tezuka's *TETSUWAN ATOM* (*ASTRO BOY*) is generally conceded to be the birthplace of modern anime. But the TV show was actually the continuation of a genesis that began in the days of silent film.

to photograph drawings chalked on a blackboard, which were then erased, replaced and rephotographed.

This early method was soon replaced by cut-paper animation, where pictures drawn on papers were cut out, placed on backgrounds, and photographed. Since the pictures were just cut-outs placed on other pictures, filming had to be done on a level table or desk. One of the pioneers of cut-paper animation was Noburo Ofuji, whose works were called *chiyogami-anime*, after the *chiyogami* —

cases based on such folklore as *MOMOTARO* (*PEACH-BOY*). They were about ten minutes long and created to accompany feature films, so the demand for them was limited at major theaters. Because of that, early animators had a hard time earning back their production costs. The technique of drawing pictures directly onto celluloid started around 1929, but because early animators were not able to afford the plastic “cels,” they used one cel over and over, washing the art away after shooting.

Gen 13: 2 B Seen?

Remember that animated version that
was announced a couple of years ago?

Hang on, fans. It's coming.

by DAVID
EVANS

At the time that *Gen 13* was little more than a hotly sought-after graphic novel, director Kevin Altieri — previously of *BATMAN: THE ANIMATED SERIES* — was already hard at work on an animated, feature-length adaptation. Three-plus years later, after rights to the title were bought by Sweetpea

Entertainment — a company better known for its ability to acquire properties than for its skill at piloting them to the screen (*Dungeons and Dragons* and *The Traveller* are also among their holdings) — and that company then entered into a deal with Disney to build a live-action franchise, the completed, Altieri version remains in re-

lease limbo. Soon, though, the wait may be over. While the word from the Mouse House remains vague at time of writing, it now appears as if the long-awaited, mutant-teen tale will be getting its public debut as soon as this summer.

Altieri recently took time out to explain the plot of his new movie: "It's loosely based on the first five issues. There are three major heroes: Fairchild, Roxy and Grunge." [Evidently, Burnout and Rainmaker did not make the cut.] *Gen 13: The Comic* is about a group of young 20-somethings who unexpectedly get transformed into various kinds of super-powered individuals. Caitlin Fairchild has super-strength and invulnerability. Freefall, aka the young and spunky Roxanne "Roxy" Spaulding, can alter the mass of any object she touches and, consequentially, can fly. Grunge, aka Percival Edmund Chang, the oft-tattooed surfer dude, has the ability to instantly mimic the molecular structure, and therefore the characteristics, of any object or person he touches.

The story opens at an Ivy League university on the Eastern Seaboard. "There's this good, smart girl, Caitlin Fairchild," Altieri explained. "She's kind of mousy, doesn't

RIGHT: Disney's latest *Bambi*. Caitlin Fairchild goes from mousy college student to super (in more ways than one) gal thanks to a covert, government experiment. **LEFT:** Caitlin's battlemates Grunge and Roxy share a rare, tender moment.





know how attractive she is, and she's having a hard time at college. Basically she's smarter than everyone else and this alienates her from the other students." Yet, Fairchild also has a dark past: "Both her parents are gone. Her father, who was a soldier, mysteriously disappeared during the Vietnam War."

The plot quickly picks up speed as Fairchild gets a curious offer. "She thinks," said Altieri, "it's some kind of ROTC program, which, if she takes it, will give her a major educational opportunity that she could not otherwise afford. She's taken to a secret base located somewhere in a western, desert wasteland, where she meets two other young people, Roxy and Grunge. But the whole thing, she finds out too late, is a clandestine-government operation." Essentially, Altieri likened it to a shadowy and twisted variant of the "Super-Soldier Program" in the *Captain America* comics. "She goes from being this virginal, mousy girl, and gets transformed into Raquel Welch with the power to crush tanks. She's super-strong, like the Incredible Hulk, with no upper limits to what she can do."

As a matter of fact, that's not all that's

astounding about Caitlin Fairchild. As she's drawn in the comic book, she possesses perhaps the most anatomically astounding female form of any superheroine. Being over six feet tall, with impossibly long legs, humongous breasts, flaming red hair and big, almost anime-styled, green eyes, she's become one of the most lusted after figures in the comic book industry. However, the movie version seems to have toned-down her sexual physicality to a great degree. "She goes from being a mere five-foot-five who wears thick glasses and is always tucking her hair behind her ears," said Altieri, "to a six-foot



five, red-headed goddess whose hair is always perfect no matter what crisis might strike. Like the comic, Fairchild is truly the star, the standout character."

In Altieri's story, a Vietnam-era, covert agency once recruited the fathers of all three kids. These men were re-created as super-soldiers. But, angered at being manipulated and used by the nation that they'd served in war, the men rebelled. "They didn't want to become just hired assassins," said Altieri. "So they refused to cooperate and the government had them killed."

Years later, the same agency tracks down the children of these men. "Fairchild and her friends are the next generation, the offspring. The agency thinks that if they go with kids, they'll be more easily controlled. But that thinking turns out to be dead wrong." That's when the action in the story, explained Altieri, really comes alive.

The film features an impressive line-up of vocal talent. Alice Witt (SYBIL, MR. HOLLAND'S OPUS, DUNE) plays the lead role of Caitlin Fairchild. E.G. Daily (PEE WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE, STREETS OF FIRE, VALLEY GIRL) plays purple-haired punk Roxy. Flea, of The Red Hot Chili Peppers and Jane's Addiction, plays hunkasaurus surfer boy Grunge. John Delancie (STAR TREK, THE NEW ADVENTURES OF JONNY QUEST) will

CIGARETTES KILL: Laura Lane brings a deadly sultriness to the voice of Ivana, one of the kids' most vexing adversaries.



play John Lynch, a grim ex-intelligence agent who acts as the team's mentor.

Cloris Leachman (YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN) will use her infamous Frau Blucher voice to play Helga, the team's stern but motherly drill-instructor. Helga, explained Altieri, only appeared on one page of the original comic. But he liked her so much that he extended the role. Altieri praised Leachman's ability to do everything in one take.

The two main villains are Threshold and Ivana. Laura Lane (CC & THE NANNY), with her seductively sultry voice will play the evil dragon lady Ivana. Mark Hamill, whom Altieri could not stop praising for his work as BATMAN's Joker, will play Threshold. Altieri's villains are irredeemable, mean-spirited, self-centered and egotistical. "They have a clear agenda which only serves their personal needs," he explained. "They'll sacrifice anyone to get what they want, which is power. Ivana's almost an evil politician. She procures black budget money to run a program to create SLB's (superpowered beings). With them, she's looking to make herself president of the United States then absolute dictator."

Kevin Altieri started his career in animation back in 1985 when he was working on THE REAL GHOSTBUSTERS (Dic Productions) as the storyboard supervisor and assistant director. "Which means," he said with near-cynical wit, "that I was the director." He also worked on the animated ALF and ALF TALES. The first was a chronicle of alien Alf's (from the prime-time sitcom of the same name) teenage years living on a Rube Goldbergesque Melmac. The second was Alf's extremely skewed version of popular fairytales, such as an Elvis-style Cinderella story.

"Dic was a bit of a struggle," explained Altieri, "because it had one week turn-arounds on all its shows. It was just a hellish schedule. I was always pushing people to the limit. We had to make it fast and good."

He worked for a brief time at Disney, where he participated in development of THE LION KING, SWAN LAKE, and TREASURE PLANET. "I never got to di-

rect a cartoon at Disney," he said, laughing. "I didn't last long enough there."

"I thought I was over animation. But then I heard that Warner Bros. was going to do BATMAN: THE ANIMATED SERIES. And, my first reaction to that was, 'Yeah... yeah...right. Here we go, another Super Friends.' But I went, well...okay. I directed it. The schedule was crazy with five shows a week, no way to maintain quality. But I had Bruce Tim (C.O.P.S.) and Peter Chung (AEON FLUX) to do character designs. It turned out to be an amazing kind of *film noir* cartoon with art deco, deep shadows and big graphic shapes. It was a whole new approach to animated filmmaking."

Altieri explained what the look of GEN 13 will be like. "There are three basic environments that the action takes place in: there's the lush, wooded New England landscape where Fairchild is going to college; there are the desert vistas of Monument Valley, Utah; and then there's the almost-alienistic technology of the secret base where these kids get transformed into heroes."

But what is it about these characters that will make us care enough to follow them

through a whole story? "These kids have good hearts and they help," Altieri explained. "They have a sense of honor. They're loyal to their friends and they don't turn their backs on responsibility. Right from the word go you know Caitlin Fairchild is a good person. So, when this government group starts giving her and the other super-powered kids orders that they know are wrong, they rebel. They're not just weapons that do whatever they're told. They refuse to fight when they don't believe in the cause. Of course, that's when the government attempts to kill them, just like it did their fathers."

To illustrate further, Altieri reveals a key plot point: "Caitlin gets separated from Roxy and Grunge. She ends up in the middle of the desert. She fights until she can escape. Then she finds out, abruptly, that she can run 60 mph. She realizes at that point that she could just take-off and leave without Roxy and Grunge. Yet, she can't abandon them. So, she goes back to help."

"They question authority, They don't listen. They don't understand what's been done to them. But again they won't knuckle down and take it anymore."

AFQ



LEMME HEAR YA SAY, "OWWWWWW:" Director Kevin Altieri found himself playing a perpetual game of catch-up as super-teen Grunge underwent multiple character redesigns over the course of the Image comic's lifetime. As in the graphic novel, though, the Big Guy's genesis is just a tad uncomfortable. Rocker Flea, of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, voices the super-dude.



SMASHING ENTRANCE: Blessed with strange, supernatural powers, Darkside imposes himself on a future Tokyo desperate for a glimmer of humanity

DARKSIDE BLUES

The star of Central Park Media's future-gothic feature is beautiful, sensitive, and mysterious. So what if his story doesn't make much sense?

by L. JAGI
LAMPLIGHTER

Back in the late Eighties, when anime in America consisted of copies of copies of videos brought over from Japan by some intrepid individual, disseminated without the benefit of subtitles or even a plot synopsis, some of the more popular works distributed within the underground were movies made from the works of Hideyuki Kikuchi: *VAMPIRE HUNTER D*, "SUPERNATURAL BEAST CITY" (known today as *WICKED CITY*), and "SUPERNATURAL BEAST CITY TWO" (a.k.a. *DEMON CITY SHINJUKU*). While no one understood the plots, fans avidly watched these titles again and again, fascinated by the spectacular animation and the hideous, body-warping villains. Today, thanks to changes in the market, American fans can enjoy both the splendid animation and the story lines of Mr. Kikuchi's works. Of late, Central Park Media has made available another Hideyuki Kikuchi title, *DARKSIDE BLUES*, a rich, moody gothic *film noir*/cyberpunk story (if you can imagine such a thing), with a minimum of body-warping monsters and a strangely appealing, mysterious hero — a true-gothic gentleman complete with lace at his throat and a flying horse-drawn carriage. Riding through a *Necromancer*-like future, he alters everything he encounters, while he himself remains untouched and unaffected.

In *DARKSIDE BLUES*, the Persona Corporation owns 90% of the earth. One of

the few places the corporation doesn't own is Shinjuku, Tokyo, also known as Kabuki Town, an area of the city the locals call the Darkside. In this free area lives a gang of juvenile delinquents called Messiah. When an escaped Anti-Persona terrorist makes his way to Shinjuku, Messiah rescues him from a metamorph bounty hunter and brings him to the house of an ex-nurse, who has lost her job for some sad reason never made clear in the film. The nurse — who hates violence because her father, an Anti-Persona insurgent like the terrorist, died fighting the corporation — slowly falls in love with her patient. When he is killed in the showdown at the end, she takes his place among the guerillas, embracing the life of violence she detested in order to forward the cause for which both her father and her lover gave their lives.

At the same time that the terrorist is making his escape, a mysterious Victorian figure in a flying carriage rides out of a mirror in the high-tech Persona Central building. Apparently trapped in another dimension (by the Persona Corporation) since he was a small child, the stranger finds himself in the midst of the city. Inquiring as to where he is, he chooses the answer, Darkside, as his name. He moves into a mysterious hotel, where he offers his visitors "renewal" — a mysterious process by which they relive their fears and dreams, apparently helping them to face the truth about themselves.

DARKSIDE BLUES especially appeals

to fans of vampire stories. Jeff Ziomer, the supervisor of production and marketing at Central Park Media reports that when the title was first released, the sales team did not place any special emphasis upon it. Jeff warned them that the title would be a popular one, and he turned out to be absolutely correct. The first year it was released, CPM offered *DARKSIDE BLUES* for sale at GenCon. The CPM booth happened to be near the booth for White Wolf, the company that prints *Vampire: The Masquerade* and other gothic role-playing titles.

"Apparently someone at the White Wolf booth started spreading the word," Mr. Ziomer reported, "because people kept coming by from their direction. After the first day and a half, we had sold out all 20 to 25 copies of *DARKSIDE BLUES*, at \$29.95 each. We had to have emergency copies Fed Ex'd overnight...When they arrived, someone went back to the hotel to get them, and after just a few hours, we'd sold those too. We had sold every copy of *DARKSIDE BLUES* Central Park Media had! I've never had anything like that happen before."

Contrary to what many reviewers have claimed, though, Darkside is not a vampire. Rather, he is a gothic hero from a tradition earlier than that of Anne Rice, a tradition where heroes could be mysterious and eerie, but not necessarily undead. Christopher Sippel, the dubbing/subtitling manager for Central Park Media sees Darkside as the



expect from the brooding characters who haunt the pages of Victoria Holt mysteries or Gothic romances. Said Sippel, "I wanted to assemble a cast that would give the anime a *film noir* ambience. I didn't see Darkside as someone who was all that happy. I did not want Darkside to come over as a pure and simple, up and down, good-guy hero, but as someone who was a little cynical."

Rachael Lillis, one of Central Park Media's veteran voice actresses, helped put some of the finishing touches on the English dub of DARKSIDE BLUES. "I was called in the last day to do half a dozen incidental voices," Rachael explained, "such as a

ing several cases of beer at once. So, sometimes you have to switch gears."

One of the more controversial aspects of the dubbed version of DARKSIDE BLUES is the blues song itself. This moody piece was sung in the original in English, but phonetically by a Japanese singer. Some reviewers have stated that Central Park Media should have had a real American blues singer rerecord the song. Sippel, however, felt the original version added to the film's general ambience. "It was well-sung in English. There was no point in redoing it. Why take on the licensing issues involved in redoing a song, when it was already in English? Besides, it was pretty unusual compared to a lot of the anime.... DARKSIDE BLUES is basically a *film noir*/science fiction piece. It has that dark aspect. Some of the riffs from the song are repeated motifs throughout the production, so we definitely wanted to keep it. In the story, it is sung by a homeless guy

classic Clint Eastwood-style, quiet hero who arrives, shakes up the town, and disappears again, himself untouched. Sippel explained, "His mere appearance galvanizes the town... into jumping into an altered reality. He seems deep, thoughtful, as if he wasn't really inclined to act much, but preferred to look and think.



DESPERATE DISAFFECTION: The inhabitants of Shinjuku province live out their days in fear of the fascistic Persona Corporation, until their world is upended by the advent of the enigmatic Darkside.

in the city park, a pre-history personage from a post-apocalyptic age, whose music reverts back to the past, 'back when times were safer and society was still in tack.' It is reactionary and comforting. Yet, at the same time, blues is a medium for the down and out — as if [the characters] were transcending through this music their down and out existence, being stuck in the [city park] square with no place to go and no job."

Hideyuki Kikuchi, the co-author of DARKSIDE BLUES, is a Japanese horror novelist. Mangas have been made from his novels, and anime have been made from those manga. Currently, the anime made from his work includes VAMPIRE HUNTER D, WICKED CITY, DEMON CITY SHINJUKU, A WIND NAMED AMNESIA, and DARKSIDE BLUES. There is a live action version of WICKED CITY, and rumor has it that there may be a live-action version of VAMPIRE HUNTER D on the way as well.

As with WICKED CITY, DEMON CITY SHINJUKU, and other anime made from Kikuchi's work, the animation quality of DARKSIDE BLUES is superb. Said Rachael Lillis, "The animation was somewhat similar to MEGAZONE 23, PART 2. Some of the scenes remind me of AKIRA, with the dour attitudes, surly body language



Like one of those taciturn Western heroes, such as Shane, or perhaps, Humphrey Bogart. A trodden-upon character trying to make good."

For Darkside himself, Mr. Sippel chose voice actor Matthew Harrington, who, instead of the softer, more feminine voice of the Japanese Darkside, gives the character a husky sounding voice such as we might

that gets fried with electrical wires to the weak old woman. When you're doing voices, you often imitate what the character is doing physically. For the old woman, I was sort of hunched over and pursing my lips to do her voice, and then the director said, 'Okay, there's this really big, obnoxious bartender. Let's do that.' And the bartender was this punk-rocky woman who was heft-

newscaster, a torture victim, a truism-saying old woman, a bartender, a nun... it was a very interesting session.

"I was in the booth about an hour. The dubbing process itself was pretty fun... one thing about doing fill-ins is that you have to shake off whatever voice you've come up with for a character and switch to something completely different. Since they were going in sequence, I went from the torture victim

FRIEND OR FOE?: Darkside offers his visitors the opportunity for "renewal," but what does his intervention mean for the war against corporate oppression?



of the characters, the dive bar... The 'good guys' have their share of flaws." The art is crisp and clear, but starkly violent at times.

There are fewer warped and contorted monsters in **DARKSIDE BLUES** than in some of Kikuchi's other works. While the work lacks anything as gruesome as the talking hand in **VAMPIRE HUNTER D**, the erotic monsters of **WICKED CITY**, or the earth, water, fire, and air demons of **DEMON CITY SHINJUKU**, the theme of men who can contort their form, distorting their bodies to produce weapons, does appear in **DARKSIDE BLUES**. The bounty hunter chasing the terrorist can twist his body in disturbing ways, as can the Persona agent who shoots missiles from his shoulder after losing his arm. Seeing the knife-fighting Messiah member parry both missiles with

his knife is definitely the best moment in the anime. If you are anything like this writer, you'll have to watch that scene at least twice.

Then again, you may have to watch the film twice, anyway, just to figure out what the hell is going on. **DARKSIDE BLUES** contains many

plot strings and very little plot. The storyline regarding the nurse and the terrorist is as close as **DARKSIDE BLUES** comes to having an actual story. The film falls short because neither the terrorist nor the nurse are main characters, that title being held by Mai, the pretty, spirited teenager who is the head of Messiah, her main sidekick, Kenzo, and Darkside. Of the three, Darkside's relationship to the plot is the most uncertain. He materializes several times to save Mai and her friends, upon occasion absorbing massive bursts of energy-based weapons and flinging them back at his attacker. However, he himself seems untouched by what happens around him, and his own motivation, as well as the reason Persona imprisoned him, remains mysterious.

The story line is confusing and disjoint-

ed, though the dubbed version is easier to follow than the subtitled version, not only because the inflections of the actor's voices make the meaning more plain, but also because it is easier to tell who is speaking. It took two viewings to figure out that Messiah was a merely juvenile gang with no associations with the Anti-Persona insurgents. The gang is initially presented as so tough and independent that it takes a while to realize that they do not really stand for anything.

The end of **DARKSIDE BLUES** leaves much to be desired. While the plot line of the ex-nurse and the terrorist is wrapped up, nothing else is really resolved. Darkside's grand "renewal" does not seem to affect anything, and Mai's cry of 'I thought I loved you,' to a character we had no reason for thinking she loved just leaves the audience puzzled. Jeff Zitomer of CPM believes that this may be because **DARKSIDE BLUES** represents only a fraction of the manga from which it was created, and presumes the audience's acquaintance with the printed version. "It's because the anime represents only the beginning of a manga that many viewers would already be familiar with. If they were to make a **SOUTH PARK** movie [as Paramount has], they would not bother introducing all the characters and their relationships to each other. Same thing with, say, the **X-FILES** movie."

Asked if he feared that repeatedly releasing anime with weak endings might erode the fan base in America, Jeff replied, "Fans know what to expect. Many anime are slice-of-life pieces, neither good nor bad, but merely continuing to the next section. Life doesn't have a lot of closure."

APQ

FUTURAMA!

In the Matt Groening future, space pilots are Cyclopians, robots are bad role-models, and mass transit sucks... literally.

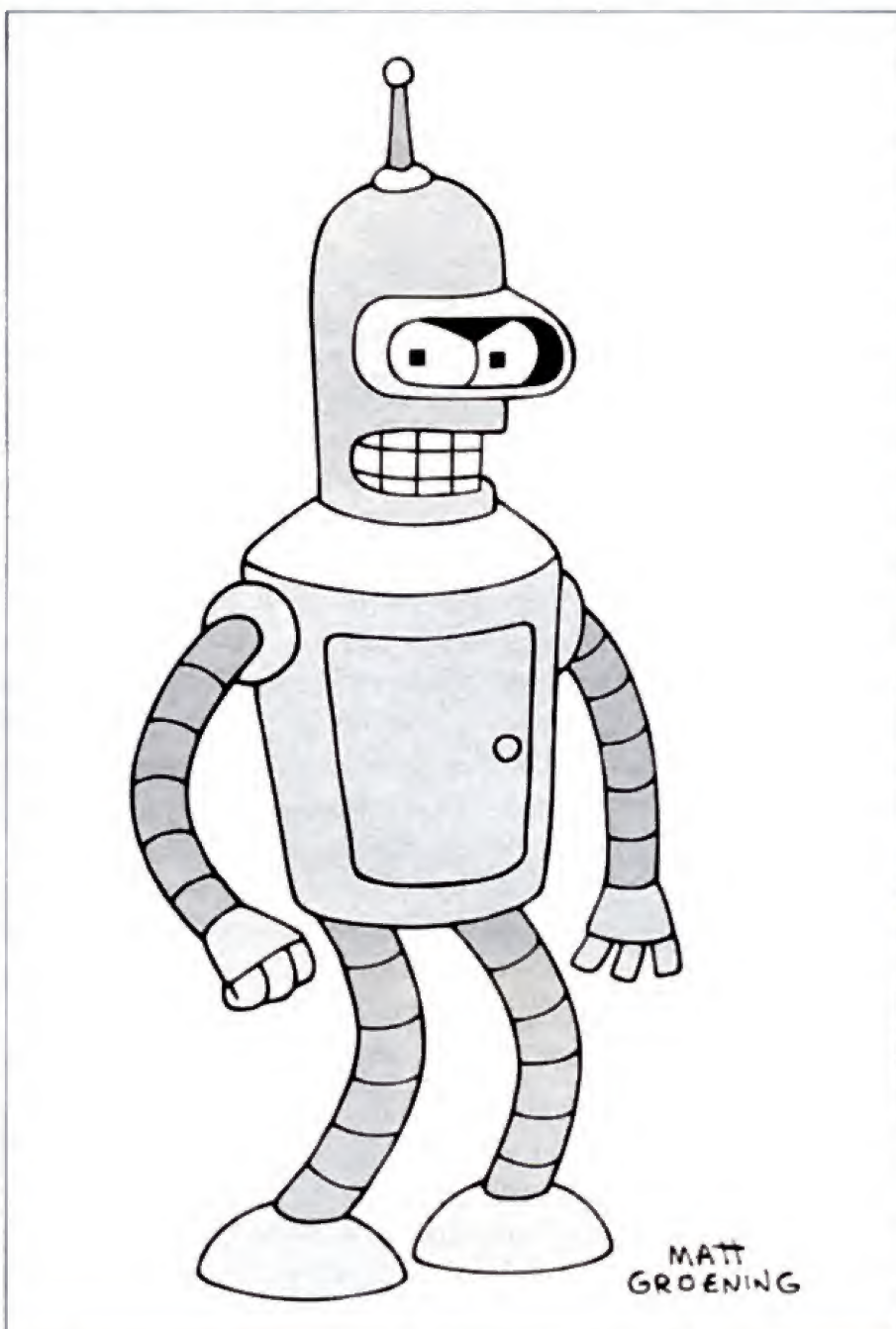
by DAN
CZIRAKY

I love science fiction. I grew up reading it," remembered SIMPSONS creator Matt Groening as he spoke before a press tour audience at Pasadena's Ritz-Carlton Huntington Hotel. "What I wanted to do was a TV show that both honored and satirized some of the things about science fiction which we love. Three or four years ago, I talked to David Cohen, working on THE SIMPSONS, about doing a show that had a science fiction format. We started reading the classic science fiction books that we grew up reading. There's been stuff written that [FUTURAMA's] been in the works for three years. Well, the first two of those years were spent reading old books. I just wanted to familiarize myself again with the genre."

FUTURAMA is Groening's new animated series for Fox Broadcasting, a skewed look at life in the year 3000 that promises to do for science fiction what THE SIMPSONS did for family values. The show stars Billy West (THE REN & STIMPY SHOW, SPACE JAM) as Fry, a 25 year-old pizza delivery boy who, on December 31, 1999, accidentally locks himself in a cryogenic chamber. He thaws out exactly 1,000 years later, into a future that he barely comprehends but doggedly tries to survive in. Katey Sagal (MARRIED WITH CHILDREN) voices Leela, a sexy, alien Cyclops who captains the Planet Express delivery starship that Fry goes to work on. John DiMaggio (MTV's THE RED JOHNNY AND THE ROUND GUY SHOW, EDDIE) is Bender, a robot who drinks, smokes, shoplifts, and indulges in mechanized pornography. The series debuted in March, moving into a timeslot on Fox's all-anime Tuesday.

Groening's nationally syndicated comic strip *Life in Hell* first brought him to the attention of the fledgling Fox network in

1987, where he originally created THE SIMPSONS as a series of animated shorts for the Emmy Award-winning TRACEY ULLMAN SHOW. It was spun-off on its



BART 2.0: Robotic layabout Bender, voiced by John DiMaggio, proves that future Earth won't all be Roddenberrian paradise.

own as a half hour series, and met with both critical and commercial success. Now the longest running prime-time animated series in history (it surpassed THE FLINT-STONES last season), THE SIMPSONS paved the way for BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD, KING OF THE HILL,

DARIA, THE FAMILY GUY, and DILBERT (plus FISH POLICE, CAPITAL CRITTERS, and, well... 'nuff said).

After close to a decade overseeing events in Springfield, Groening is ready to take another crack at series TV. "It's really hard to do more than one show," he explained. "That's why there hasn't been a SIMPSONS movie, because we're working so hard on making the shows as good as possible. One of the great things about THE SIMPSONS is, after 11 years, I can sit back and turn my attention to a second show and feel like THE SIMPSONS is going to stay on course."

So, just what sort of future does Groening have in store for the 31st century? "There's certain conceptions of the future which I think are more interesting than others," he elaborated. "You know, my older brother had a pile of science fiction magazines and books and I loved those covers. I just thought it would be really cool, as a kid, if those covers could come to life. I love the look of the 1940s and '50s and early '60s. In the 1970s, things got kind of grim, and in the 1980s, it was, like, dark and drippy. You know, pipes were always dripping in BLADE RUNNER. We decided what we wanted to do was kind of a JETSONS universe with drippy pipes, basically. Our show takes place in the year 3000, and it's amazing — there's a Y3K problem. They just didn't think about it."

"In science fiction, there's always some sort of wish fulfillment and fantasy, but then you put in the stuff that you think is going to happen. And we've created a world, I think, more like we think it's going to be, not how we wish it. For instance, in the future, one of the great things is there's going to be 5,000 networks, but UPN will still be in last place. The NRA is still around, but they're now crusading for

the right to bear death rays. You know, gadgets don't work right. I think the fun thing is to create these gadgets. People get around in New York City—where the show is set, built on the ruins of New York City—by pneumatic tubes. I don't know exactly how the technology works. It's very fast, but you end up often hitting a brick wall when you come out at the end."

One of the more bizarre features of *FUTURAMA* is the show's handling of celebrity cameos. "Basically, any celebrity who wants to do *FUTURAMA* is more than welcome on the show," explained series executive producer David X. Cohen, "but they have to agree to play their disembodied head preserved in sort of a jar of Oil of Olay that keeps them young forever. In the can, so far, we have Leonard Nimoy and Dick Clark in the pilot! We have Pamela Anderson and Ron Popeil. One of our selling points is that Matt agreed to play his own head in a jar. So, I think he'll be making a little



BEHOLD! THE WONDERS OF THE FUTURE: Rocket-powered gridlock, rampant commercialism, and in the midst of it all, a 20th-century delivery boy (Billy West) and a curiously sexy Cyclops (Katey Sagal) LEFT: Alien sawbones Dr. Zoidberg



cameo in the background, a little Hitchcockian cameo, in the pilot. That's to try and soothe people a little bit. And why those specific people? Leonard Nimoy, obviously, just because, as huge sci-fi fans, we wanted to have some link to the stuff we were parodying. I've been told that when I got my photo taken with Leonard Nimoy,

no one I worked with had ever seen such a huge smile on my face. Dick Clark, because the pilot takes place on New Year's Eve of the year 3000, so he's an obvious candidate for Rockin' New Year's Eve 3000. Ron Popeil invents the technology to keep heads alive in jars. So, we had to have him. And Pamela Anderson, I think it was mainly just for the irony of cutting her off from the neck down, we thought it would be good. Actually, I think they said I might have had a bigger smile on my face when Pamela Anderson..."

Joked Groening, "One of the fun things about doing this show is basically taking the success of *THE SIMPSONS* and knowing what we're doing, this time." However, there will be some noticeable differences between the two shows. "*FUTURAMA* is animated by a studio called Rough Draft. It's owned and run by some of the original *SIMPSONS* animators, who worked on some of the very early shows and branched off and went and created their own studio. This is their first prime-time animated se-

ries, and they're just knocking themselves out. Part of the reason why I went with them is because they were just so eager and they have so much heart. They're fantastic. The animation is a combination of conventional cel animation and computer animation. But what we did is, we tried to flatten things out so it doesn't look 'computer-y.' We're completely pleased with the results so far. Again, part of the reason why I do what I do is I don't want to repeat myself. *THE SIMPSONS* does what it does really well. But, because we have rocket ships and ray guns and crazy robots and all this stuff, it lends itself to a more ambitious kind of animation. You do the animation that's appropriate for your show. And after doing *THE SIMPSONS* since 1987 on *THE TRACEY ULLMAN SHOW*, my ambitions have gotten more exalted." As for the characters bearing a marked resemblance to Springfield's favorite, dysfunctional family, Groening laughed. "That's the only way I can draw, is with big eyeballs and no chins."

APQ



PRINCESS



MONONOKE

A walk through Studio Ghibli reveals the genesis of director Hayao Miyazaki's masterpiece.

by ANDREW
OSMOND

Studio Ghibli, as Western journalists point out, looks rather small for a world-class film studio. Located in Tokyo's suburbs (Koganei City, to be precise), at first sight it's an ordinary-looking, albeit attractive tall white building, situated by a railway line and, less happily, several electricity pylons. Many employees commute by bicycle. A multitude of windows reflect the sunlight and keep the interior bright. Within, the first two floors resemble most people's idea of an animation workplace: dozens of artists laboring at desks, shelves groaning under files, videos and reference books. This was the birthplace of director Hayao Miyazaki's most stunning film, *THE PRINCESS MONONOKE*.

EXTENDED GENESIS

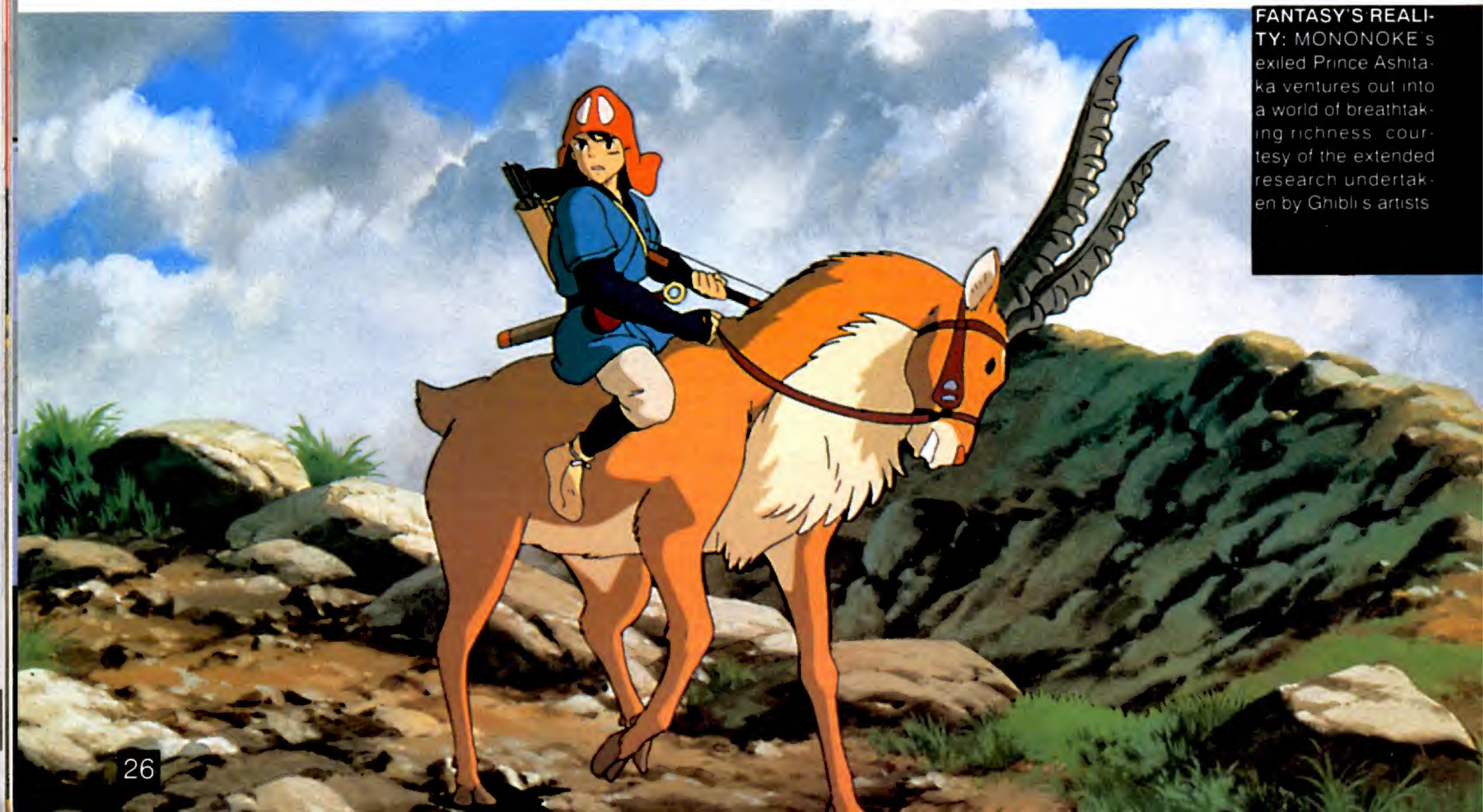
Miyazaki first conceived a *PRINCESS MONONOKE* story in the late '70s, while a TV animator at Tokyo Movie Shinsha. This first version, however, was very different from the final product. Instead of an epic war between man and nature, the story was a variant on *Beauty and the Beast*, with an innocent young princess forced to marry a mononoke – in this case, a flying cat-beast which looked like a fearsome precursor to Miyazaki's gentle Totoro.

A picture-book compiling Miyazaki's image boards from this project was published in 1993 by Tokuma Shoten, but, even though Miyazaki pitched this as his next film after *NAUSICAA*, it was rejected in

favor of *LAPUTA: CASTLE IN THE SKY*. (Interestingly, he pitched a Samurai drama at the same time, apparently called *Sengoku Majou* (*Sengoku Flying Castle*), combining Samurai, a *LAPUTA*-style floating castle and a girl from either outer space or the future.)

MONONOKE actually has more in common with the manga version of Miyazaki's *Nausicaa* than the time span between them would suggest. The former started as a simple fable about the beauty of nature and the horror of war, eventually drawing Miyazaki into deeper and darker waters. Speaking to the Japanese *Yom* magazine in 1994, he commented, "I can't simply explain the relation between nature and humans, or nature in a human. To live is to

FANTASY'S REALITY: *MONONOKE*'s exiled Prince Ashitaka ventures out into a world of breathtaking richness, courtesy of the extended research undertaken by Ghibli's artists



keep this superficial balance, so I can say we should do such-and-such to keep a balance. [But] if I go deeper than that, I face chaotic questions... the darkness of the universe."

In another interview for *Comic Box* (1995), Miyazaki focused on the issue of agriculture. "It's said about four million people could live on the earth as hunters. When we reached that number, we could no longer hunt, so we invented farming. The moment we invented farming, we started to plunder nature mercilessly. Both famine and abundance are contained in the cycles of nature, and that's the way people were before they took a bite of the apple, so to speak. When you search for the reason why humans did such a foolish thing, you arrive at the start of farming. At that point, it's no longer a case of 'why would humans do such a stupid thing', but simply 'well, that's humanity for you.'"

These themes — first enumerated in *NAUSICAÄ* — would underpin *MONONOKE*'s fable of young Ashitaka, the prince of an Emishi (barbarian) tribe in medieval Japan. In Miyazaki's story, Ashitaka is forced to defend his village from a Tatarigami (curse god). Cursed by the beast, Ashitaka is exiled and travels west to the fortress of Tatara-ba (literally "iron-making place"), a community at war with nature itself, fighting animal gods and their human ally, San, a "Princess Mononoke" (ghost or monster) raised by wolves and sworn to the destruction of humanity.

But Miyazaki did not reduce *MONONOKE* to a "nature good, industry bad" tract. As he once commented, "things are easy if one thinks only bad people cut down trees. But the problem is complicated because good people cut trees to survive. If there's a child crying because he's starving, and a forest next to the child, the good person cuts down the forest to feed the child. But all ecological problems arise because

he does so. Miyazaki's intention was to show this dilemma, not solve it.

As he said in his *MONONOKE* proposal, his purpose was to "depict what constructs the unchanged basis of humanity throughout



CHILD OF FEAR: In a medieval forest, a family escapes a wolf-pack by throwing their baby at the snarling animals. Revulsed by this act of cowardice, the wolf god Moro raises the child as her own. Years later, San will serve as the forest's instrument of vengeance against its despoilers, and be dubbed by her victims *Mononoke Hime*, the Princess Mononoke.

time, overlapping the current era — going through changes toward the 21st century — with the equally confusing Muromachi era — which moved from the collapse of medievalism towards the system we have today." And, one might add, both for better and worse.

BREAK OUT THE PENCILS

It's the little things that stand out at Ghibli. A wooden Totoro greets you at the entrance, in front of a frame saying Baka! ("Fool!") written by voice-actress Tokiko Kato, whose character, Gina, used the word affectionately of Miyazaki's aviator hero Porco Rosso. More cuddly Totoro adorn studio shelves and the meeting room-cum-



library. The walls are adorned with posters for Ghibli films, including the upcoming *YAMADAS* — the latter, unfortunately, revealing little about the film. The third floor holds not only the art department but a female common-room where twice-weekly *seitai* sessions (a chiropractic-like, body realignment technique) were held during *MONONOKE*'s production. Within this mix of business and comforts, the world of *MONONOKE* was built.

Mononoke featured five art directors — an incredible number for an anime film — all respected veterans of the industry. Kazuo Oga was art director on Miyazaki's *TONARI NO TOTORO* (*MY NEIGHBOUR TOTORO*, 1988) and Takahata's two films *OMOHIDE POROPORO* (*ONLY YESTERDAY*, 1991) and *HEISEI TANUKI GASEN POM POKO* (*WAR OF THE RACOONS*, a.k.a. *TANUKI WAR*, or just plain *POM POKO*, 1994), all portraying a pastoral Japan. Beyond Ghibli, he drew backgrounds for the harrowing *HADASHI NO GEN* (*BARE-FOOT GEN*, 1983). Oga worked on Ashitaka's home village in the opening scenes, Shishi-gami's forest in daylight, and the rebirth of nature at the end of the film.

To research *PRINCESS MONONOKE*, Oga traveled to the Shirakami Sanchi, a mountainous region in the northeast part of the main island Japan, where Ashitaka's Emishi tribe once lived. (In fact, the Emishi had vanished by Mononoke's Muromachi era, hence Miyazaki's postulation of

a last group in self-imposed isolation.) Nearly 17,000 hectares of unspoiled beech forest have been designated a World Natural Heritage property.

Among the trees which grow there is the "Nezuko," whose trunk is red in Shirakami. Oga decided the tall watch-tower Ashitaka climbs at the start of the film would be made of this tree, so he used patches of red for the structure, and also for the forest by

Ashitaka's village where the tatari-gami crashes through in the opening.

"There are many photo books about forests," Oga said. "But the pictures in them are already finished, complete. When we research locations, of course we see the scenery as a whole, but we also need to take shots of details like undergrowth, fallen leaves, the trees you see behind a larger tree. Different areas of a forest have different kinds of undergrowth and so forth. You must see with your own eyes to make a convincing picture."

The other four directors, along with background artists and Miyazaki himself, all went to Yakushima, a roughly circular mountain island with an area of 500 kilometers. Another World Heritage site, Yakushima enjoys a warm, wet climate and is home to a tremendous range of tree species, including the ancient Yakusagis (native cedars), which date back millennia and can have diameters of five meters. This incredible setting was also an inspiration for the world-dominating toxic jungle in Miyazaki's epic NAUSICAA.

Nizou Yamamoto, like Oga, worked on the forest, including the last poignant image of destruction and hope. He was art director on CASTLE IN THE SKY (Buena Vista's name for TENKU NO SHIRO LAPUTA, 1986), Takahata's HOTARU NO HAKA (GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES, 1988), and the TV shows FUTURE BOY CONAN, and SHERLOCK HOUND, both of which involved Miyazaki. He said the trip to Yakushima gave him much inspiration, causing him to alter the light coming down through the trees — which looks white in photos — to the blue-cast glow it bears in reality. He was also led to paint the clear pool at the forest's heart (an important set-



ting in the film) using black, though it was hard to find the right blackness.

While Ghibli has a reputation for intricate backgrounds, Yamamoto stressed that too many details can make the picture "noisy," choking its impact. A balance must be sought. There are other pitfalls in making ornate backgrounds: "When the image becomes too picturesque, it's like a theatre stage. After Miyazaki pointed that out, I understood that I have to express backgrounds in their natural state. A stage set has introverted [self-directed] colors. Miyazaki told me to make them extrovert."

Naoya Tanaka worked on several Ghibli films: OMOHIDE, POM POKO, Miyazaki's KURENAI NO BUTA (PORCO ROSSO, 1992) and Yoshifumi Kondo's MI-MI WO SUMASEBA (WHISPER OF THE HEART, 1995). Tanaka was also art director on Tomomi Mochizuki's '93 Ghibli TV film UMI GA KIKOERU (OCEAN WAVES) and the non-Ghibli KAZE NO

YONI, KAME NO YONI (LIKE THE CLOUD, LIKE THE WIND, 1990). Fan myth holds LIKE THE CLOUD is another Miyazaki film: in a sense it is, but by Akira Miyazaki (writer), not Hayao.

Tanaka worked on some of the film's most sweeping, spectacular scenes, such as when Ashitaka leaves his village and traverses wind-blown plains and rocky mountains. "Ashitaka leaves his native village alone with his curse," Tanaka said. "So, at least let the landscape bless him — that was Miyazaki's intention. Though Ashitaka is travelling with the curse of death, the natural scenery doesn't change. It's not a gentle world, but Miyazaki wanted to bring out its beauty."

One scene in particular, in which Ashitaka meets the monk Jiko Bou on a track outside a market, was a challenge. "Miyazaki's storyboard said, 'An evening near a village in Muromachi era. It's beautiful, but melancholy at the same time. Draw it as if you have seen it.' But how could I do that when I hadn't seen it? I asked Miyazaki, and he just said 'If you drew it as if you had seen it, wouldn't you feel you had beaten it?'"

"So I tried to draw like that! But when I showed Miyazaki my first pictures, he laughed. I was wondering what was funny, and he explained, 'It's strange to have grass in the middle of the road in this era.' Then it struck me. Unpaved roads in [today's] countryside have grass in the middle, since cars run and leave wheel tracks. But in that time, few people had carts. They and their horses would walk. So I laughed out loud, too."

For a later scene where San and the wounded boar-god Okkotonushi flee the carnage of battle, Miyazaki told Tanaka, "Let's use Shiratani Unsuikyou." This was the first location the team visited in Yakushima. It was beautiful, shining with water drops from rain the day before — and this for one of the most gruesome and bloody sequences in the film! Tanaka acknowledged he had trouble drawing the

GHIBLI AT WORK: Director Hayao Miyazaki (second from left) and staff consult with color designer Michiyo Yasuda (seated at desk). **ABOVE:** San with adoptive mother Moro.



Continued on page 30

PRINCESS MONONOKE

Grave of the Fireflies

Studio Ghibli's dip into a more recent past led to this acclaimed, disturbing drama.

by MARINA FRANTS

In a train station in 1945 Japan, a young boy lies dead, clutching a metal candy container full of ashes. As a train pulls away, two ghostly children — the boy and his sister — board an empty car, while fireflies dance in the air around them.

"September 21, 1945," the boy's voice narrates. "That was the night I died."

This haunting scene begins *GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES* (*HOTARU NO HAKA*), the film that you show your friends when you're trying to convince them that anime is more than giant robots and big-breasted, squeaky-voiced females in skimpy outfits. In many ways, it does not feel like an animated film at all. The character designs, by Yoshifumi Kondo, are realistic. The setting — rural, 1945 Japan — is presented with a painstaking attention to detail. And the story, based on a 1967 autobiographical novel by Akiyuki Nosaka, is heartbreaking without being in the least bit sentimental.

Nosaka's 2-year-old sister, Keiko, died of malnutrition at the very end of World War Two. He wrote *Grave of the Fireflies* as a way of coming to terms with his grief and guilt. In an interview for *Animage* magazine, Nosaka stated that he wrote the novel as a "double suicide" story, patterned after the structure of classical Japanese plays by Chikamatsu Monzaemon. He "wanted to depict the idealized humanity of a brother and sister, or, ultimately, of a man and a woman," as well as to demonstrate the harsh realities of war. This is heavy burden to place on the shoulders of two characters whose ages add up to 18, or on an 88-minute animated film. But the beautiful, nuanced animation and excellent voice acting of *GRAVE* succeed in conveying the many

layers of the novel.

The story follows the experiences of 14-year-old Seita and his 4-year-old sister Setsuko after their mother is killed during the Allies' firebombing raid on the town of Kobe in March, 1945. At first, the children stay at the home of a distant relative, but the woman's coldness eventually drives them away, and they must try to survive on their own. It is a doomed attempt, and the fact that the viewer knows this from the beginning does nothing to lessen the impact. At first, Seita views his and Setsuko's situation as a grand, romantic adventure, the two of them against the world. But when their food stores run out, reality sets in, and the children find that they cannot survive outside the system. As they sink into hunger and despair, the film becomes at times almost too painful to watch.

Unusually, the movie was distributed not by any of Japan's numerous animation studios, but by Shinchosha, the publishing company that put out Nosaka's book. For this, their first venture into moviemaking, Shinchosha recruited Isao Takahata, one of Japan's most respected animators.

Takahata has been working in animation since his graduation from Tokyo University in 1959. Since the mid-sixties, he has frequently worked with Hayao Miyazaki, a collaboration that produced such classic ani-

me features as *NAUSICAA OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND*, *LAPUTA: CASTLE IN THE SKY*, and *KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE* (all three of which are included in the distribution deal with Disney). By the late eighties, the two were working together at Studio Ghibli. At the time, Miyazaki was having trouble finding financial backing for *MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO*, a project he'd wanted to make for a long time. Miyazaki's collaborator on the project, *Animage* editor Toshio Suzuki, approached Shinchosha with the idea of packaging *GRAVE* and *TOTORO* as a double feature. Suzuki hoped that the novel's high reputation — it won the Naoki Award, Japan's version of the Pulitzer Prize — would attract a wider audience. Shinchosha accepted the offer, and the two films were released together in 1988.

The initial theatrical release lost money, but critical acclaim guaranteed that *FIREFLIES* would have a long and healthy life on video. In 1993, Central Park Media released an English-language version of the film, both in dubbed and subtitled formats. The American critics responded with an enthusiasm similar to their Japanese counterparts. The *New York Times* called it "elegiac and riveting." The film was screened at 1994's Chicago International Children's Film Festival, where it won top prize in the "Best Animated Film" category, as well the

"Rights of the Child" category, which rewards the film that best represents the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

Nosaka's sister died one week after the end of the war, just as the lighting restrictions were lifted, and the countryside was lit up again. "My sister died on my side of the world," he said, "and light was coming back in the other." It is this contrast between tragedy and optimism that makes *GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES* so powerful to watch.

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DON'T LOOK AWAY: Graphic visuals and uncompromising drama turned Isao Takahata's *GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES* into a vanguard example of anime's growth beyond giant robots and skin-tight jumpsuits.



scene, especially as Miyazaki emphasized backgrounds and characters should work together, producing a complete image.

"Miyazaki said the background was another leading character," Tanaka recalled. "A scene is comprised by backgrounds and

appearance was especially important. As Ashitaka and his companions emerge from the kodama (spirit)-haunted forest, they look over a lake at the defiant black settlement that shrouds the rock behind it in smoke. The image Miyazaki gave Takeshige was, "Something clinging to the virgin forest, like a tumor...The only part of nature where humans live and dig up mountains to make iron." Recalled Takeshige, "I tried to make Tatara-ba massive, something which could stand up to nature."

Takeshige also worked on a key character scene, when Ashitaka encounters Moro by moonlight on a ledge over the thick forest. "The storyboards said it would be blue-toned and clear. But I couldn't do it well." He had to rework it for several months. Such

this was supposed to be Miyazaki's retirement place after he quit Ghibli in January '98. Prior to MONONOKE's release in 1997, though, the director and his staff had more to occupy their minds than thoughts of days at leisure.

Masashi Ando, who worked as supervising animator on MONONOKE, worked to four or five in the morning during the film's production. Every day. Joining Ghibli in 1990, Ando started inbetweening on ONLY YESTERDAY, before moving to key animator on PORCO ROSSO, OCEAN WAVES and POM POKO. His debut as a supervising animator was on the six-minute short ON YOUR MARK.

"People tend to think Miyazaki's art style is simple and soft," Ando said. "Actually, he doesn't have a style. What he wants to draw exists somewhere else, and he asks himself, 'I want to make it this way. What do I do?' He goes through trial and error; he gropes for ways to express the images better. He often says, 'I draw as if I'm sketching a real place and the real, breathing people who live there.' That brings up considerations such as making these things easier to draw, finding the best way to render them

characters together." Not that this ruled out contrasts or complexity. "Miyazaki would tell me things like, 'This is such-and-such a scene, so it needs to be lighter, or clearer, or fresh green,' or something like that. But I didn't have to take him at his word and use a single color, or make it monotone. I always put contrasting colors in a single image. Miyazaki wanted richness."

Satoshi Kuroda worked for KIKI, PORCO, POM POKO, UMI and as art director on MIMI. He also worked for Mamoru Oshii's acclaimed PATLABOR 2 (1993). He was responsible for San's memorable first appearance as she sucks blood from Moro's wound by the river, as well as the mountain battle preceding it and San's confrontation with Ashitaka after her rescue from Tatara-ba. The riverside scene alone took about half a year.

Referring to this, Kuroda commented, "I took a lot of photos in Yakushima, but I don't look at them while I'm drawing. I prefer to work from memory, creating the scenery according to my mental image." Not that this made things easy, even with an apparently minor detail like rocks on a riverbank. "Some parts of a rock have a lot of moss, other parts don't. And there are many kinds of rocks. So I had to consider where to put what. I struggled with the scene for a long time!" he laughed.

Youji Takeshige worked for TOTORO, OMOHIDE, and every Ghibli film from then on. He was the art director of Miyazaki's spectacular short ON YOUR MARK (1995), as well as working on a roll-call of anime fan-favorites from Gainax and Oshii: WINGS OF HONEAMISE, GUNBUSTER, both PATLABOR films and GHOST IN THE SHELL.

He mainly worked on Tatara-ba, the forest-eating fortress of Lady Eboshi. Its first

creative challenges were common with MONONOKE. "For another part of the film, I dreamed I was walking in scenery which was exactly what we needed. I lay on the grass and thought, 'Oh, I know how I should draw it.' Then, I went to work, and what I had drawn was so different from my dream that I didn't know what to do..."

Once again, it would take a long period of painstaking redrawing to transfer the vision of Mononoke to screen.

LIFE, FRAME BY FRAME

The whole of Studio Ghibli was designed by Miyazaki in the middle of working on 1992's PORCO ROSSO. (Ghibli president Toshio Suzuki thinks that Miyazaki's method of relieving stress is to lumber himself with an even greater problem.) Another Miyazaki creation, the Butaya ("Pig House") studio is located 50 meters away, where the maestro teaches directors-to-be the rigors of animation. Also known as Atelier Nibari-ki and "Senior Ghibli,"

LUSH DISCOVERY: A member of the Ghibli background staff works on the blend of detail and abstraction that the studio has become famous for. **ABOVE LEFT:** Background artist Noboru Yoshida.



BELOW: Complex alliance. Defying standard expectations for an animated film, Miyazaki created a relationship between exiled Prince Ashitaka and feral child San that avoids easy answers. **RIGHT:** Model sheet of San.



who did key animation on **GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES** and **POM POKO** and supervising animation on **WHISPER OF THE HEART**. He also worked in a central animation role on **MONONOKE**, on the raging boar god/ Tatarigami at the beginning of the film. The other appointee was Yoshifumi Kondo, one of Ghibli's most important animators and director of the acclaimed **WHISPER**, the most successful Japanese film of 1995. Speculation that Kondo might one day replace Miyazaki as a prime force at Ghibli was cruelly cut short in January 1997 when Kondo, age 47, died from an aneurysm. Mononoke was his last project.

into two dimensions. That's why his 'art style' is the way it is."

Usually, it's the supervising animator's job to check and correct the key animation. However Miyazaki's "hands-on" approach involved taking that duty himself, leaving the supervisor to clean-up the resultant pictures. "The challenge was keeping faithful to the nuances of what Miyazaki wanted to do. The movie has a hard theme, and Miyazaki felt the pictures should be good enough to go with such a theme. The lines in Miyazaki's drawings themselves are rough, though they contain many meanings. So I picked up the lines and interpreted the meanings as best as I could. Still, Miyazaki often said, 'No, this isn't right.'

San was especially difficult. I could not understand what I was doing wrong. That means that I was misreading the rough drawing."

Despite the frustration, Ando found the experience rewarding. "It was good to see how Miyazaki works with my own eyes. I took this job because I felt that this might be the last time for him to do everything [work as both animator and director]. I really wanted to see it up close. But I wish I had been competent enough to tell him, 'No, this is the better way!' to some of what he proposed."

Later in the production, two other animators were appointed to help Ando with the workload. One was Kitaro Kousaka

SOUL OF THE NEW MACHINE

There have been changes at Ghibli, even since **MONONOKE**. Despite its name, the first-floor ink and paint department is now 100% digital, computers and mice replacing paint and brushes. Drawings are scanned, digitally painted and filmed, completing Ghibli's long journey to high-tech production. The CGI department on the same floor is much extended, taking over a hall once used for paint bins. Ghibli's computers, by the way, are named after the studio's characters. There's Ashitaka, Eboshi, Pazu and Sheeta, with the two biggest ones called Shishi-gami (after the towering forest-god in **MONONOKE**) and Yamada-Kun. The

basement holds two massive computer-controlled multiplane cameras named Yamato and Musashi, after the World War II battleships. Yet for all the signs of the digital era's influence on the studio, the introduction of electronic filmmaking to the facilities was a long and complex process.

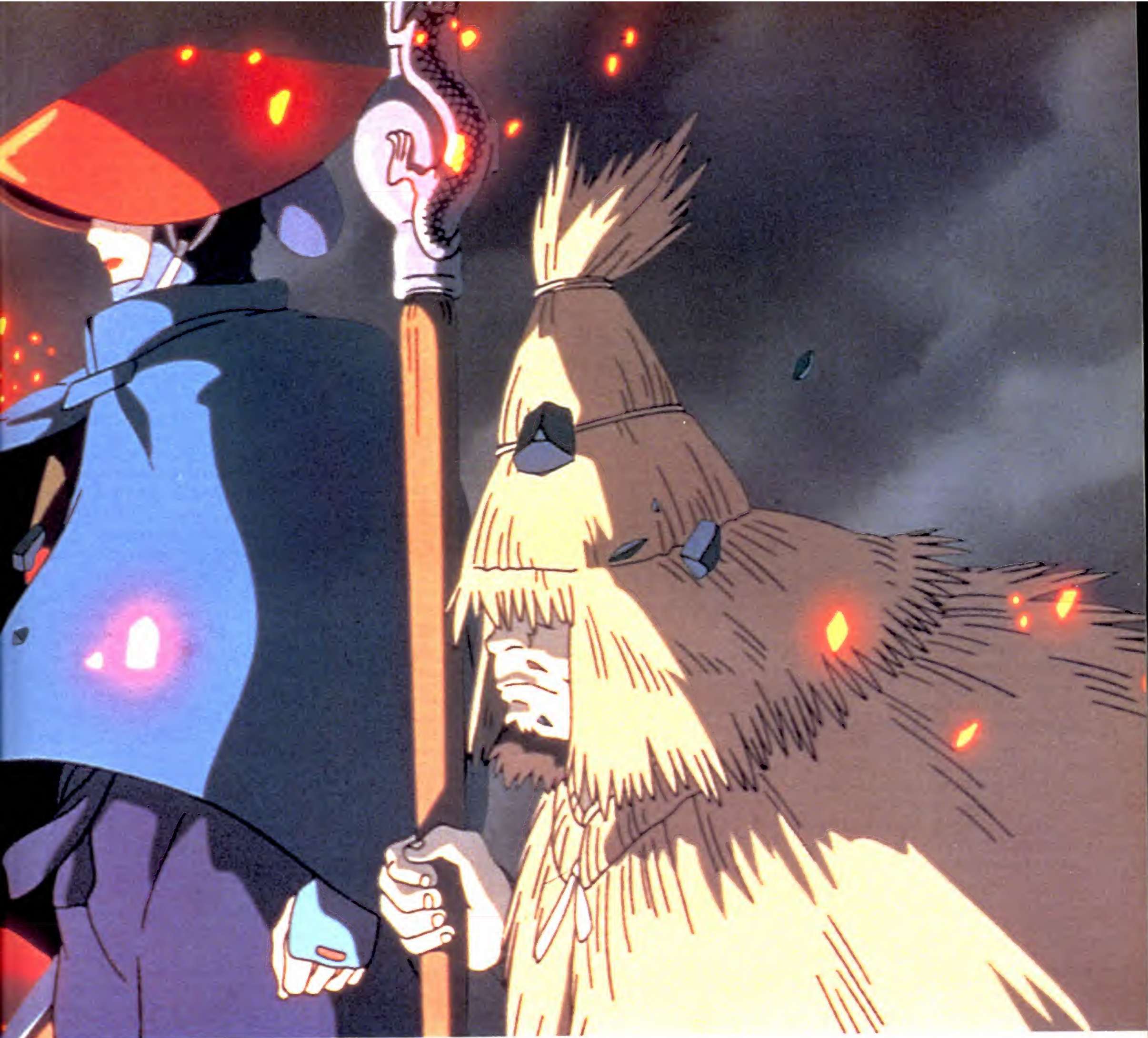
In 1986, there was much excitement in the animation world at the inclusion of a couple of minutes of computer effects in the latest Disney cartoon. The film in question was *THE GREAT MOUSE DETECTIVE*, and computers were used to provide the cogs and gears for a climactic scene in which Basil battles the Moriarty-like Rattigan in the innards of Big Ben. At the time, the British *Sunday Times* newspaper praised the sequence as one which "couldn't easily have been done in the old days and must rank as one of the high spots in film animation."

What fewer critics noted was that the finale was strikingly similar to the clock-tower battle in Miyazaki's TMS film *CAGLIOSTRO NO SHIRO* (*CASTLE OF CAGLIOSTRO*) seven years earlier. No computers, no CGI... but while Miyazaki's sequence may lack the clockwork smoothness of Disney's version, it more than matched *MOUSE DETECTIVE* in terms of invention and excitement. And for many Miyazaki fans, the difference was representative of a director for whom computers were as redundant as song 'n' dance routines — an innovation that wasn't needed. That attitude was passed on in the founding of Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli.

Take animated crowds. The individuated, algorithmic CG masses of the latest DreamWorks or Disney blockbuster may be impressive, but for personality or detail they lag behind the painstakingly detailed individuals of *KIKI* or *WHISPER OF THE HEART*. The not-needed attitude was confirmed by Miyazaki himself as late as 1993.



HONEST OPPOSITION: Lady Eboshi's past is shrouded in mystery (although fans have conjectured that, as with the women who found refuge at her Tataraba, she was once a prostitute who purchased her freedom). As envisioned by Miyazaki, this mistress of the iron foundry displays an emotional complexity that puts to rest the stereotypical vision of a despoiler of forests.



Speaking to *Animerica*, he commented, "My sense is that the introduction of computer graphics into animation has become a sort of competition with video games. If that's the case, well, video games will win. People who want to use computer graphics should use them, but personally I'm not interested."

Yet two years later, computer effects crept into the Miyazaki-produced *POM POKO* – albeit of the blink-and-miss-them variety, like a few seconds' pan past a series of library shelves. They were more prominent in Ghibli's 1995 film *WHISPER OF THE HEART*, which, although mostly directed by Yoshifumi Kondo, had some spectacular dream interludes by Miyazaki. The most famous of these is a breathtaking sequence in which the heroine takes flight

through an almost impossibly detailed vertical fantasy landscape created by artist Naohisa Inoue. Although the elements were traditionally hand-animated, they were digitally combined and entwined by computer. Computer effects also figured in Miyazaki's music film *ON YOUR MARK*, made the same year.

Why the change of heart? Partly it related to industrial changes, an evolution in anime away from the gimmickry of 1984's *SF SHINSEIKI LENSMAN* (whose *CRAY* supercomputer-generated effects bore a suspicious resemblance to *TRON*) toward the more impressive, integrated work in Mamoru Oshii's *KOUKAKU KIDOUTAI* (*GHOST IN THE SHELL*, 1995) and Shoji Kawamori's *IHATOV GENSOU: KENJI NO HARU* (*KENJI'S SPRING*, 1996).

However, there is an amusing story which gives the credit to Ghibli's president, Toshio Suzuki.

As the story goes, Suzuki bought a PowerMac 8100 during the making of *WHISPER*, much to Miyazaki's displeasure. At the time, Miyazaki would not even use computers for color designs – which would allow the mix-and-match of color combinations without painting – dismissing it as a tool for incompetents. When a production manager enthused over the increased efficiency, Miyazaki retorted he would be the first to be replaced by the machine! As the story goes, Suzuki won over the director by the ploy of installing Shogi (Japanese chess) software in the Mac, and hooking Miyazaki on it, to the point where the direc-

Continued on page 38

PRINCESS MONONOKE

Joe Hisaishi

The composer, long a Miyazaki mainstay, takes new risks with his MONONOKE score.

There are some filmmakers who are inextricably linked with the music of a certain composer. Try to imagine Spielberg without John Williams, or Alfred Hitchcock's greatest work without Bernard Herrmann. For animation, think of the enormous impact Alan Menken has had on post-Eisner Disney.

In the same way, Miyazaki's films are pervaded and largely defined by the music of Joe Hisaishi. From the elegiac melodies playing over the Bayeux-style tapestries in NAUSICAA, through the pulse-pounding chords as the Laputan robot awakens; from the lullabies of TOTORO and the Italianate refinement of KIKI and PORCO ROSSO, to the haunting falsetto melody as MONONOKE's end-credits roll... yes, it really is the same man behind it all.

Not that Hisaishi is Miyazaki's full-time associate. He's provided music for two major anime actioners by Yoshikazu Yasuhiko: ARION (1986) and VENUS WARS (1989). He also worked with Isaku Fujita and Masahisa Takeichi on APPP's anthology ROBOT CARNIVAL. On TV, he composed

for Tatsunoko's 1983 SF serial KIKOSO-SEIKI MOSPEADA (GENESIS CLIMBER MOSPAEDA), one of the anime shows reworked into Harmony Gold's controversial ROBOTECH saga.

Beyond anime, Hisaishi's composed for 13 live-action films, including Takeshi Kitano's (a.k.a. "Beat" Takeshi's) HANA-BI, which won "Best Film" at 1997's Venice Film Festival, lionized by critics who would run screaming from "Japanimation." More recently, he executive produced the opening and closing ceremonies at the 1998 Nagano Paralympics, composing its theme song.

Like the film itself, MONONOKE's score had a long and, by Hisaishi's account, painful genesis. "Compared to other Miyazaki films, it was particularly hard," he said. "I writhed! I knew what I was in for from the beginning, though. Usually, I concentrate on work for a certain time, and finish when I clear a standard I set myself. But with MONONOKE, the production was so drawn out, it took forever to finish to my satisfaction."

Miyazaki first talked to Hisaishi about

the film at the end of 1995. "The story wasn't finished yet back then, and Miyazaki talked about why he had to make this film at this time, rather than [describe] the story itself. After the new year, he gave me several 'key words,' concepts he wanted incorporated into the score. This is how we've worked together since NAUSICAA. But the key words this time were things like 'Tatari-gami [Curse God],' 'Wolf God Moro,' and 'Forest of Shishi-gami,' and I was reduced to saying, 'Uh?'"

"It was particularly difficult because the images were based on the dramatic, scary parts of the film. I mean, can you imagine the joy of Tatari-gami? And here was Miyazaki asking for a score that covered the whole range of emotions, a symbolic melody that was violent, gentle, and growling at the same time."

Because Miyazaki wanted a provisional soundtrack to work with even in early production, Hisaishi quickly made an "image album," the Japanese name for a tie-in record inspired by a movie. (The much-publicized albums based on DreamWorks'

PRINCE OF EGYPT are a recent Western analogue.) "The important pieces in the image album were eventually used in the movie," said Hisaishi. "These were the main Mononoke theme; *Ashitaka Sekki* [*The Tale of Ashitaka*]; and *Ashitaka and San* [which plays before the end credits]."

The eventual MONONOKE film soundtrack was constructed from two of these early themes: *Ashitaka Sekki* (the "epic" tune heard at the very beginning), and the orchestral form of the MONONOKE theme. In the film, the theme also appears as a haunting falsetto melody which plays during Ashitaka's night-talk with Moro, and again over the end credits. Originally, this was not going to be a falsetto song. Miyazaki had a habit of writing poems for Hisaishi to reflect the images he had in mind; Hisaishi

OUT OF THE FOREST, OUT OF THE PAST: Composer Joe Hisaishi relied on traditional Japanese tonal schemes to emphasize the historical background of PRINCESS MONONOKE, including this scene in which ethereal kodama escort the travellers out of the woods



put one of these poems to music on his image album, using a female singer. Later, Miyazaki happened to be listening to his car radio when he heard Yoshikazu Mera, an award-winning countertenor whose output ranges from spirituals to musical numbers. Suffice to note that Mera's contribution to *MONONOKE* is unlike anything heard on a mainstream animation feature in the West.

However, Hisaishi found the rest of the album would not work for the actual soundtrack. "In the album, I had to express the world of the movie without images. Since *MONONOKE* has such a dramatic story, I played up the drama, emphasizing the power of a magnum opus. But when I came to compose music for the film itself, all that power was on screen al-

SOUND COLLABORATION: Composer Hisaishi (center) consults with conductor Hiroshi Kumagai (upper left and lower right) on the *MONONOKE* soundtrack.

nuance disappears."

Hisaishi cheerfully said he thinks movie music is artificial. "You don't get music in your daily life, do you? Even in a movie, it's unnatural to have music. I always feel it's unnatural. But I want to make it not unnatural, to construct reality in another sense."

The innovations eventually moved beyond the thematic. "It was my first Miyazaki film with a full orchestra; my intuition told me I needed it. Also, as my recent theme, I've been trying to incorporate a pentatonic scale [a five-note scale characteristic of traditional Japanese music

ished, about how to achieve a better harmony between the images. When Miyazaki asked questions, I found I felt the same way, and for the parts I wasn't sure about, Miyazaki would say at that place, 'I wonder...' With Toshio Suzuki, the producer, as well, we had a very deep collaboration.

"For my past films with Miyazaki," Hi-



saishi recalled, "I would ask him to come to the orchestra recording where I'd present my finished work. With *PRINCESS MONONOKE*, it was different. Early on, I made a 'raw' video with music, without sound effects or anything, and gave it to him. Miyazaki wanted to change several things after watching it. I had a hunch that I'd no longer be able to work in the same way as I had been working so far. So I threw it all out,

changed everything. I felt that I wouldn't be able to go one step farther otherwise... how foolish! But I could express myself in a new way this time, because of that challenge.

"I don't think that because I'm a composer I only have to compose music. I think that I should consciously understand the movie, seeing the entire process of production. I participate as one of the main staff, and express my opinion about the images on screen. To understand what Miyazaki wants, I have to truly understand the way of thinking, the background of Miyazaki." **AFQ**

Andrew Osmond

and Irish folk-music: one example in *MONONOKE* is the striking theme which plays as the kodamas lead Ashitaka and two Tatarigami men through the forest]. I gave a lot of thought to how I could express the beauty of it.

"At the same time, since the story took place in Japan, I was thinking about the Japanese atmosphere, Japan's view of the world. At first, this limited my imagination. Japanese music instruments such as *shakuhachi* [a vertical bamboo flute] and *biwa* [a Japanese lute] have very particular sounds, so I didn't know how I could use them." It didn't help that the sound of *shakuhachi* is popularly associated with genre Samurai dramas, something Miyazaki wanted to steer clear of.

"In the end," Hisaishi said, "I used such instruments as *hichiriki*, *ryuuteki* (both Japanese flutes), and Japanese drums as far as they didn't limit the images. I wasn't intending to limit the sound structure to a Japanese one just because I used a pentatonic scale, but when I tried a piece with Western codes, it didn't fit well. Miyazaki also said, 'Isn't this different from the sounds you are trying to make?'"

During the production of the film, Miyazaki was a frequent visitor to Hisaishi's recording studio, where the pair discussed the music attached to the rushes. "We talked after each piece was fin-



ready. So I changed focus, trying to express the feeling of characters or Miyazaki's own inner world."

Hisaishi continues, "Even though characters may be fighting on screen, they can also be experiencing hidden, compelling feelings. [This is particularly true of the tentative relationship between San and Ashitaka.] For *MONONOKE*, I thought it was important to express these feelings. You can't spell them out in dialogue — a character doesn't say 'I'm having such a hard time.' But if you put music to such a scene, you can convey the subtleties. In that sense, the music of *MONONOKE* is based on Miyazaki's thoughts. It's a different approach from my past work."

Music, Hisaishi believes, is most similar in structure to movies. "Both are constructed on a time axis. Because they are similar, there's a danger of putting too much music in the movie, expressing everything with music." In such cases, music and image cancel each other out. "When you have a subtle screen image — for example, a slight change in a character's expression — and the music suddenly goes, 'Boom!', all that

BELOW: Hiroshi Kumagai conducts the *MONONOKE* orchestra.



PRINCESS MONONOKE

Talking the language of MONONOKE
with dubbing director

Jack Fletcher

by DAVID
HUGHES

Having raised the standard for English language dubs of Japanese animation a few notches with such translations as GOLGO-13, BIO-HUNTER, TEKKAMAN, HURRICANE POLYMAR and the ever-popular TENCHI MUYO, and having brought his audio expertise to such groundbreaking, domestic animation as MTV's AEON FLUX and HBO's SPAWN, it is hardly surprising that dubbing director Jack Fletcher was the man Disney called upon when the company purchased distribution rights to five films by legendary Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki.

Fletcher's first project under the Disney deal was directing the acclaimed new dub of KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE, featuring the voice talents of Kirsten Dunst (INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE), Janeane Garofalo (COPLAND)

and the late Phil Hartman (SMALL SOLDIERS). On this and the other Miyazaki projects — including LAPUTA, CASTLE IN THE SKY and the eagerly awaited PRINCESS MONONOKE — Fletcher has worked closely with Miyazaki's representative, Steve Alpert. "There is a high degree of mutual respect, so if there is any misunderstanding, I am able to explain the cultural differences," he explained. "Steve [has] been very involved in the whole process of dubbing, scriptwriting, and getting words that feel organic and spontaneous to fit into the characters' mouths. Steve is responsible for the final translation. He is fluent in Japanese, and understands a great deal about how even the inflection of a line can change the meaning of Japanese — things that I suspected but was never specifically privy to."

In addition to casting KIKI and LAPUTA "from top to bottom, and all the ancillary characters on MONONOKE," Fletcher said that he and Alpert

did "a complete pass" at rewriting each of the three scripts — even though Neil Gaiman, creator of SANDMAN and NEVERWHERE, had already spent months working on the English language version of PRINCESS MONONOKE. "Neil had done a full adaptation of the script," Fletcher explained, "[and] I thought the language was beautiful, and that the story was told beautifully. It was great. The problem was that when I opened his script, I immediately looked at the left hand margin for timecodes, and there weren't any! So before I even finished reading the first page, I got on the phone to one of the [U.S.] producers and said, 'Has this been timed out to picture?' and they said, 'Approximately.' It needed somebody to go through it to find out that we didn't have an abundance of dialogue, or too little dialogue. It took almost three weeks to go through the entire script, with Steve's notes, to fix the things that he was very concerned about, and to sync it

up."

One of the major differences between dubbing Japanese animation and directing the voice cast of, say, AEON FLUX is that with English language shows, the voices of the actors are recorded before the animation is created, whereas on KIKI and the other Miyazaki dubs, Fletcher and his cast are recording to a pre-existing picture to which the translated English dialogue must be matched (or "synced"). "Although I know the dubbing process on a Miyazaki or some other anime would be frustrating for some voice directors, I prefer working on [post-dubs], because the rules are so finely established. You have the picture there in front of you, [so] you know the pace of the scene, and you can't alter it because it's locked down. All it's really about is finding the subtleties, how a particular line will sound the best and work the best." In fact, as Fletcher pointed out, all Japanese animation is made by

VOICES UNITED: Calling upon the same star-power that drove the successful dub of KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE, Disney/Miramax has cast actor Billy Crudup as cursed prince Ashitaka, and Claire Danes as wild-child adversary/ally San.



recording the actors' voices after the animation itself is completed — the opposite way to the Western process. "I have a great deal of respect for both ways of working; I see positives on both sides. But it seems to me a very accurate metaphor for the differences between the Eastern and Western cultures: if it happens one way in America, you can pretty much depend on the reverse being true in Japan."

Having the picture already

and brings them into the story, then that's wonderful," he said, pointing out that "purists" will delight in the fact that Disney is also planning to release subtitled versions of each film.

Most of Fletcher's cast for the Miyazaki dubs — including Billy Crudup (SLEEPERS), Claire Danes (ROMEO & JULIET), Gillian Anderson (THE X FILES), Minnie Driver (GOOD WILL HUNT-



can relax into it, and sometimes, in spite of themselves, they begin to coordinate with

"As a dubbing director, one of the things I'm striving to do is access the rules of the



WIT AND WISDOM: As the opposing forces of nature and humanity, Fletcher was given Minnie Driver as the Lady Eboshi (above), Billy Bob Thornton as the disreputable monk, Jiko-Bou (left), and Gillian Anderson as the wolf-god Moro (below).

the sync."

With KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE already in stores,

world," he explained. "What is the style of the world, and what does that mean vocally? Is it

in place still leaves room for considerable flexibility, however, as demonstrated by Fletcher and Phil Hartman in the characterization of Kiki's cat, Jiji. "I think Phil had one or two things that he improvised, but most of it was stuff that I wrote knowing that, with Phil playing Jiji, we needed to develop the acerbic, witty, sarcastic relationship which exists between [the witch and her familiar.] There were [other] things, [such as] the scenes between Janeane Garofalo and Kirsten Dunst — especially in the cabin in the forest — that I felt did not have as much of a comic ring as they needed to; those needed some sanding and polishing." Fletcher made no apologies for the alterations and enhancements he and Alpert made to the basic translations of Miyazaki's scripts. "My feeling about animation is that, much like a Shakespeare play, it's open to interpretation. I have tremendous respect for Mr. Miyazaki — all of his films are masterpieces, especially MONONOKE — but while I [endeavor to] interpret and be true to the spirit and to the story of the films, any colloquialisms [or] jokes that don't translate, or language that sounds stodgy, I'm not reticent at all to change. It's just another version, [and] if it's engaging to some people

ING) and Billy Bob Thornton (ARMAGEDDON) for MONONOKE, and James Van Der Beek (DAWSON'S CREEK), Anna Paquin (THE PIANO) and Mandy Patinkin (ALIEN NATION) for LAPUTA — have been newcomers, both to the art of "vocal characterization," and to the work of Miyazaki himself. "The look, the feel, and especially the sincerity and depth of the storyline was something that they were not used to at all," he said. However, even those actors who, like THE SIMPSONS veteran Phil Hartman, have considerable animation experience can find it difficult adjusting to the process of looping, or recording to a pre-existing picture. "Phil had had a tremendous amount of experience in his earlier days of dubbing certain things — he'd done some Saban stuff, I think — and it's always refreshing when you get somebody who understands the rules, and is therefore able to set himself free with it. With actors who haven't done it before, it's an acclimatization process. It takes [time] to relax them, so that it doesn't feel mechanical, and they're not intimidated by trying to match to the picture. My focus is always on the character," he adds. "That way, they



CASTLE IN THE SKY forthcoming, and Miramax gearing up for a theatrical release of PRINCESS MONONOKE, Fletcher has already moved on to other projects, including the next Miyazaki dub, rumored to be PORCO ROSSO (a.k.a. THE CRIMSON PIG). In addition to his work on the latest series of SPAWN, and Disney's direct-to-video sequel THE LITTLE MERMAID II, Fletcher is also supervising Samsung's eagerly anticipated ALEXANDER, a major new anime series based on the history of Alexander the Great, which will reunite Fletcher with AEON FLUX creator Peter Chung. Despite the diversity of these projects, however, Fletcher said that his working methods remain constant.

like AEON FLUX, a sort of [film] noir, and purposely ambiguous, verbally? Is it like SPAWN, very intense and hyperreal, where you're not afraid to cross the vocal line into the operatic? Is it like LAPUTA, a mix of sincerity [and] hyperkinetic characters? I try to concentrate on performance and acting so that the characters are engaging to the ear. Sometimes I think that gets lost in some other dubs I've seen — the concentration is about getting the 'sync' right; and that the attention to performance, that sensitivity, is lacking. Having said that," he added, "I know how difficult it is just to get one done, [so] regardless of how I personally, aesthetically feel about the outcome of it, I'm always appreciative of the effort."

AFQ

tor could be seen daily hectoring the computer to hurry up with its turn. Oddly, when the staff started using computer-aided color design on WHISPER shortly after, there was no objection from above.

So much for the past. MONONOKE marks the most extensive use of CG in a Ghibli film, with some 15 minutes' worth of computer effects, though ten of those are for scenes using digital ink and paint only. The remaining five use various CG techniques, such as texture mapping, 3D rendering, morphing, particles, and digital composition. The goal was to produce "CG which doesn't look like CG," and enormous care was taken to blend CG and cel animation seamlessly. "We wanted to make it natural," said Mitsunori Kataama, one member of the CG department. "We didn't want it standing out. There are pieces of CG that only the people who worked on know they're there. Also, there are scenes that look like they were computer-generated but weren't."

A whole new CG room was set up for the film; by the end, Ghibli had two servers (machines that perform the actual processing of images), 21 desktop client computers (that operate as individual workstations), and peripherals such as printers and scanners. Computers were also used for filming and digital composition. Except for film recording, done by the laboratory IMAGICA, almost all CG-related work was done in-house. Toward the end of production, it was found there was insufficient manpower to paint the last 5,000 cels. To make the deadline, Ghibli drafted animators who had finished their jobs to paint the remainder digitally.

"We used several complex filming techniques in MH," said Atushi Okui, Mononoke's director of photography. (Part of the filming department, Okui worked in tandem with the CG department on computer effects.) "We also worked on digital composi-

tion, looking into the potential of digital technologies. The filming department saw CG as the next step we had to take, focusing on how we differentiate the uses of digital and analog, and—conversely—how we could merge them. It'd be no good if the same characters and backgrounds have different colors on film between digital and analog (traditional photography). So it was our priority to match the colors in the same scene."

Mitsunori Kataama has worked on CG since 1986, including stints on the OVA series MACROSS PLUS and Miyazaki's ON YOUR MARK. "In terms of the numbers of scenes in MONONOKE," he said, "an overwhelming percentage were painted on cels and photographed on film. In the end, about 150 scenes were digitally produced, and this is less than 10% of the entire film. [MH has about 1,600 scenes in total.] It was a logical conclusion that the CG department adjust itself to analog." All the colors used in Mononoke were scanned into the computer. However, the color on the computer monitor looked different from the color on the cel, and different again from the color in the actual film. The solution was to trust neither the monitor nor the cels, but to "fix" the colors by looking at the film output itself. By using such decisions as the basis for Mononoke's "data of colors," the staff could subsequently trust the color would be consistent, irrespective of whether it was "on-cel" or added digitally. Screen tests were made to double-check that the color was standardized in practice.

In scenes where the background moves as the camera moves, the convention was to animate backgrounds using cels. The snag is that such background animation often couldn't live up to the detailed backgrounds painted by the art department. Texture mapping, however, offered another way of moving background pictures. First, a 3D computer model was created of the terrain in a

particular scene, and animated in the computer with parameters such as the undulations of the land and the speed with which the camera zooms in. Next, scenery was created by "mapping" the pictures painted by the art department onto the model made by the CG people. In this way, the high-quality paintings could be made to move.

One scene which uses texture mapping is the dynamic set-piece in which Ashitaka, just starting his journey, happens on a village being sacked by bandit Samurai. As Ashitaka charges down a path, there's a complex mix of perspectives: Ashitaka's first-person view of the bandits and villagers he's approaching, a side-on view of the Samurai shooting at him, even an "arrow's-eye" view as missiles are fired between combatants. Explained Kataama, "There's a shot where the camera runs along with the Samurai as they ride between rice fields. At first, we were going to use background animation [animating backgrounds using cels] for the fields moving from left to right. But the animator who was responsible for the scene came to us with Miyazaki, and asked if we could do it with CG. We scanned in the pencil layouts of four frames drawn by Miyazaki, and pasted them to the simple data of two virtual 'boards,' a horizontal one and a slope. In this way, we could animate the backgrounds in the full detail painted by the art department. In the final film, we used more than two boards, adding the thickness of the rice plants, the unevenness of the ground."

Another example of texture mapping occurs when Ashitaka sees the forest god Shishi-gami for the very first time. As he gazes across a tranquil grove at the forest's heart, he glimpses the creature moving in the distance. The virtual "camera" zooms in, passing several trees to give the impression of movement into the forest. A 3D computer model was created, with transpar-





THE HAUNTINGS: The *kodama* (left) are benign spirits of the forest who also serve as heralds of the god Shishi-gami. **RIGHT:** Ashitaka envisions the calamitous boar attack that would eventually lead to his curse. **ABOVE:** The Prince breaks bread with Jiko-bou, a monk whose motives are not as friendly as they first appear.

ent “sheets” standing where each tree would be. The tree art (again provided by the conventional art department) was “past-ed” (mapped) onto each sheet. The background image of Shishi-gami was a traditional cel. The effect can be seen as analogous to the painstaking multiplane camera images of past decades. There’s a similar moment later in *MONONOKE* as San races up to Eboshi for their duel in Tatara-ba.

An early scene where the maddened Tatari-gami attacks Ashitaka’s village was also computer-aided, though not as much as many people think. The Tatari is a giant boar, but until it dies it’s covered with a mass of worm-like feelers, giving it the appearance of a grotesque spider. Most of the Tatari’s movement was hand-animated, but for a few shots the feelers were created as a CG wire-frame model, programmed with data on shading, movement, and perspective from all angles. The CG rendering was facilitated by Toonshader, a new software package developed by Ghibli and the computer giant Microsoft.

The application varied from shot to shot. For example, for one critical moment when Ashitaka pulls back the bow to shoot the fatal arrow, the “feelers” eating into his arm are computer-generated while every-

thing else is hand-drawn. In contrast, the dramatic image of the Tatari chasing Ashitaka across open fields a few moments earlier was entirely hand-drawn. However, the layers in this latter image, five in all, were put together with digital composition: the Tatari Gami (as an outline and as a detailed “mass” with shading and texture), the green field, the path running through it, and Ashitaka and his mount, Yakkul, themselves.

Meanwhile, the clinching shot of the arrow hitting the Tatari’s eye is 100% computer-generated – the only such shot in the sequence. Yosiyuki Momose was responsible for the effect (he was formerly an animator on Takahata’s *GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES* and *ONLY YESTERDAY*). “It took a lot of time and effort to do a satisfying job,” he said. “I wanted the mass of feelers to have texture, volume, elasticity,

but it was difficult to express such feelings. The feelers wouldn’t behave naturally, squashing each other as they would if you were drawing them by hand. I wanted to convey the feeling they were cramped together, but that’s very difficult with CG. We can’t simulate at that level. The computer helps to a point: transforming a sphere, putting feelers on it, increasing the number, moving them around, changing the timing of the movement. But beyond that you have to work manually. So for the transformations and the feelers moving violently around, I animated frame by frame, as if I was drawing in-between animation, though the computer made some movements.”

Masafumi Inoue, who’d worked for games companies like JCG and Namco and developed the 3D effects for the *Ridge Racer* game, was engaged in writing a program to crack the “feeler” problem, but, as he



wryly recalled, "Miyazaki wouldn't wait that long." He was, however, instrumental in the development of Toonshader. "When I first joined Ghibli, there was already a shading software called Toonshader, but the version at that time was hard to use. I thought I could make it easier. So I showed a sample I made to Momose to get his opinion, and then customized it." The specifications were written by Yoshinori Sugaya, on loan from the Japanese TV network NTV (Nihon TV), which has invested in Ghibli films since KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE a decade ago. "At first, the software couldn't deal with outlines," he said. "They were most difficult, because they shouldn't be too clean or neat. And when one object is interacting with another, sometimes you want an outline, and sometimes you don't."

The Tatari-gami sequence saw a different effect, when the creature – its boar-features uncovered – dies and decomposes in seconds. The image was achieved by a "morph:" rather than animating the scene by hand-drawing in-betweens, the computer was given three main pictures showing the rotting stages and then reshaped and overlapped them. A similar effect was used for the film's last scene. But for many viewers,

The Didarrabocchi itself was hand-animated. However, the CG department also turned it into a wire-frame 3D model, within which the computer created a myriad of star-like "light particles," their movement determined by gravity, wind and the movement of Didarrabocchi's transparent body. In creating the particles, the animators first planned to draw on a non-CG technique. "In animation in the past," said Kataama, "light particles were filmed using permeating light through pinholes in black paper, or by making lith masks." Such techniques are commonly used for anime special effects, such as fires and explosions. Normal cels are photographed by reflecting light on the cel, but in these cases the light is photographed *through* transparent cels. Usually the unnecessary part of the cel is masked by painting it black (the lith mask). In general, the "permeating light" is then superimposed onto the normal cels by multiple exposure.

"We tried to have the same effects as these techniques," said Kataama, "but at the same time, have smaller particles than permeating lights. Eventually, we decided to digitally animate the particles, make lith masks from the printouts, and film them. In other words, the plan was to make the mate-

digital composition instead. However, unlike permeating light, it wouldn't look like light if we just digitally composited white particles. Light looks like light because the surrounding parts are blurred." The image was further manipulated to make the particles fit with other elements on screen.

"As with the cases of mapping," said Kataama, "you can't tell these particles are CG if you stop the film and look at the image by itself. The only reason you might think that it was CG would be because it'd be difficult to animate any other way. That's the quality I wanted."

CONQUEROR PRINCESS

PRINCESS MONONOKE was released in the summer of '97, handily eating HERCULES' lunch and eventually beating out cosmic nice-guy ET: THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL's long-standing, Japanese box-office record. When MONONOKE broke ET's record, Miyazaki commented he wasn't sure what he had made or accomplished. More than a year on, that answer holds true. "I still haven't figured it out. I haven't even been thinking about MONONOKE much. I find the issue kind of painful to think about,

so I've put it on hold and haven't got back to it. From the audience reaction I think it's kids who understand it most." When asked to explain this last comment, Miyazaki replied, "To put it simply, they're willing to sit through the movie. That's an amazing thing for me."

On the upcoming American release, he's neutral, almost indifferent. Asked what he thought about his (already) considerable fan-base around the world, he said, "I feel flattered, but I don't know what to say, other than thank you. The Western release is something Disney will deal with, and I'm not involved in it. I made the movie for Japanese people." Toshio Suzuki, president of Studio Ghibli, concurred, "We aren't making films to sell them in the US. We're making them for the Japanese market."

Suzuki should know. He was central in orchestrating MONONOKE's promotional campaign, active in everything from poster design to theatre selection, and accompanying Miyazaki on a

22-city tour. The key to success, he once explained, was getting enough companies interested to generate tons of free publicity. The prestigious array of MONONOKE partners included NTV, Japan's highest-rated network; the advertising giant Dentsu; and, of course, a certain Walt Disney Company, now distributing MONONOKE overseas through its subsidiary, Miramax. Suzu-



the most spectacular use of CG was in the portrayal of the Didarrabocchi, the nocturnal incarnation of the Shishi-gami nature-god, which materializes at dawn like an ethereal Godzilla (or, to use a higher-culture comparison, like a Goya giant). Miyazaki's concept of the Didarrabocchi was "night itself," and the artists wanted to convey the sense of a piece of night sky walking.

rials for the lith mask film with the computer. But when we started working, it turned out that printing 30 sheets of paper took 18 hours! The resolution needed to be high so that the differences in the size of the particles could be seen. But that took half an hour per sheet. And when we filmed using the lith mask, the particles showed up bigger than we thought. So, we decided to use



ki's partnership with Miyazaki goes back to his days as founding editor on *Animage*, the most respected anime magazine in the world. Suzuki was vital in persuading both his publishers Tokuma Shoten and Miyazaki himself to animate the *Nausicaa* strip (serialized in *Animage*). The success of the 1984 film led to Tokuma creating Studio Ghibli, which Suzuki helped launch a year later. Miyazaki once described him as "a baby boomer who loves to manipulate the general audience... If it weren't for him, there wouldn't be a Ghibli."

"I'm not interested in how Disney sells MONONOKE," said Suzuki frankly. "I don't know much about the American market. Of course, I hope it does well, but the selling of MONONOKE in the West is for Disney to consider. If a movie sells well in Japan, and as a bonus, gets to the U.S., that's great. MONONOKE was such a case, and I'm also hoping YAMADAS will be released and do well in the States, since it's about how Japanese families have been living, and how they will live. I want Americans to see that. Today, we are talking about 'global standard,' and everyone thinks we have to be like Americans. I don't like that. I'm not a nationalist, but I want to keep the way we've been doing things."

But isn't there a threat to Ghibli's independence, especially as the Disney is funding 10% of YAMADAS' production? "I wish they'd interfere! I want to hear their opinions! But they aren't saying anything [about YAMADAS.] In filmmaking, it's best to get opinions from many people. If there's constructive opinion out there, I

wish to hear it! A good author needs a good editor to write a good book. In the same way, we need outside opinion in creative work."

Contrary to anti-Disney pundits, Suzuki believes the company makes a clear distinction between creators and marketers. "The marketing side respects the creator side, and doesn't invade its domain. The Disney marketing people respect the product made by creators. I appreciate this attitude. Other companies who contacted Ghibli always wanted to cut the film. I didn't want that, it's just too tiresome. It's been 10 years since the older films like KIKI were made, and I don't want to go back and discuss what scene should be cut or not. But Disney offered a no-cut deal, saying it was out of respect to the creators. And with MONONOKE, they've let Stephen Alpert, president of Tokuma International, check translation and dubbing." Alpert is in close contact with both Suzuki and English scriptwriter Neil Gaiman (See the Gaiman interview last issue).

Can MONONOKE succeed in the U.S? "I don't know. That's up to Disney and Miramax." Did they have trouble with the violent content, or the length of the film? "They seemed surprised by the violence, but no one said anything about length." Did they want to make cuts? "Yes, they asked to cut several scenes [presumably the bloody ones], but were bound by the 'no-cut' clause." The point has been insisted on by Miyazaki and Ghibli ever since NAUSICAÄ (the film), was released as a hacked U.S. video in the mid-'80s.

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?: The residents of the Tataraba (above) raise conflicting questions about the price of progress. **LEFT:** Model sheet for an Emishi elder.

The name MONONOKE led to more discussion. "They can change the title to whatever they want," said Suzuki. "Miramax is considering several options. Harvey Weinstein [president of Miramax] said *The Legend of Ashitaka*, one of Miyazaki's original titles for the film, didn't sound so good, and I agreed. Weinstein said he wanted to respect the strange feeling the word "Mononoke" has. But the word "Princess" comes with a certain image in the U.S., it sounds like a children's film. So Weinstein said he couldn't release the movie called PRINCESS MONONOKE and I said it was up to him." Actually, at the time of writing, the Miramax trade ads continue to call the film PRINCESS MONONOKE.

"The movie is in their hands," Suzuki admitted. "Once it crosses the border you can't do anything about it. For example, when CITIZEN KANE came to my home town when I was young, it was 60 minutes long, though the original is two hours. But MONONOKE is a case of 'no cuts, no music changes.' At least that's the contract."

"It's like your child being adopted and going to a foreign country. It's up to the adopting parents whether he or she becomes a good child or a bad child." **APQ**

Additional material and Japan interviews
by RYOKO TOYAMA

PRINCESS MONONOKE

Origins & Influences

Hayao Miyazaki draws on Japanese history, world mythology, and his own past work to create the world of MONONOKE

Anime fans have long known their favorite medium draws on anything and everything for its substance. (See last issue's analysis of EVANGELION, which packed in references ranging from Gustav Jung to ULTRAMAN.) Consequently, it's not surprising that PRINCESS MONONOKE carries a huge amount of thematic and narrative baggage. A direct source for the filmed MONONOKE, cited by Miyazaki himself, was the epic poem *Gilgamesh*, one of the great ur-texts of heroic fantasy, recounted through Hittite, Assyrian and Babylonian empires from c. 2500 B.C. The story tells of a semi-divine king of Erech (now Warka in Iraq) who recaptures the city of his father and fells forests to expand his realm. In the process, he incurs the wrath of Humbaba, fire-breathing god of the forest and...

well, suffice to say, the remainder bears out Miyazaki's conviction that man can't challenge nature without paying the price. The analogy between Gilgamesh and MONONOKE's Eboshi is plain, despite the characters' separation by four millennia.

Beyond these derivations, much of MONONOKE is rooted in Japanese myths and icons. As explained in the last issue, the image of a character sever-

ing his hair to cut himself off from his past is a Japanese archetype. Medieval literature is full of stories of heroines severing their hair before becoming Buddhist nuns.

Again, the title given Eboshi in the film ("Gozen" or "Lady") would remind many viewers of Shizuka Gozen, a 12th-century dancer/prostitute who courted the rich and famous and wore an Eboshi, a Japanese men's hat. The implication is that MO-

NONOKE's character Eboshi — an assumed name? — was forced to prostitute herself in the past, explaining why she now rescues women and gives them a future. Miyazaki later revealed the back-story he imagined for Eboshi: sold overseas and forced to marry a Japanese pirate, then killing her husband and returning armed with Ishibiya (Chinese "hand cannons").

There are, of course, more familiar precursors to MONONOKE. The gentle, impossibly understanding boy who teaches a girl her self-worth is a common motif in shojo manga and anime. It also recurs in Anno Hideaki's FUSHIGI NO UMI NO NADIA (NADIA OF THE MYSTERIOUS SEAS, a.k.a. SECRET OF BLUE WATER), a TV series whose Miyazaki-like heroine suffers an identity crisis very similar to San's. Even at Studio Ghibli, it isn't just Miyazaki who makes films about magic spirits and the clash of man with nature. Isao Takahata's smash hit HEISEI TANUKI GASEN POM POKO (WAR OF THE RACCOONS) (1994) treads similar territory to MONONOKE, down to the ambivalent resolution.

MONONOKE also extends themes and ideas in Miyazaki's own work. For example, anyone interested in San's lineage can



DRAMATIC ANACHRONISM:

Although in reality their society was extinct by the time of MONONOKE, Miyazaki posits an Emishi village still surviving in the farthest regions of Japan.

find her ancestor in TAIYO NO OJI HORUS NO DAIBOKEN (THE ADVENTURES OF HORUS, PRINCE OF THE SUN), a 1968 Toei Doga film and one of the first to feature Miyazaki's story input. A U.S. dub appeared in the '70s called THE LITTLE NORSE PRINCE; a more recent theatrical sub was screened this year as part of the UCLA *Magical Boys and Girls* series.

HORUS' most memorable character is Hilda, a bewitching harp-singer who appears in the midst of a deserted village and entrances the boy-hero. But Hilda has a dark secret — her guardian is an evil ice wizard who wants to destroy humanity. (Both Hilda and San are adopted by supernatural forces, though for very different reasons.) For much of the film, Hilda tries to convince herself she hates "lesser" humans, working to destroy the community they've set up. But in the end, mainly thanks to Horus' kindness, she relents and braves death to set things right.

Two decades later, more MONONOKE elements appeared in *Shuna no Tabi* (*Shuna's Journey*, 1983), a watercolor manga written and drawn by Miyazaki, published in book form by a subsidiary of *Animage* magazine. The strongest parallels to MONONOKE are at the beginning. A noble, androgynous-looking prince (Shuna) sets out from his famine-stricken kingdom to find the fabled Golden Wheat. The story introduces the Yakkul, Miyazaki's imaginary breed of horned deer, which both *Shuna* and MONONOKE characters use as mounts. An early scene, where Shuna and an old man converse round a campfire is close to

Ashitaka's encounter with Jiko-Bou after the skirmish with the bandits. *Shuna* also shares the darkness of MONONOKE: the hero's quest brings him great pain, though the ending is one of hope.

MONONOKE's closest ancestor is Miyazaki's epic KAZE NO TANI NO NAUSICAA (NAUSICAA OF THE VALLEY OF WIND), not only the 1984 anime, but the thousand-page manga version serialized in *Animage* through the '80s and early '90s. Again, there are specific points of contact. Nausicaa, a gentle princess, is clothed in a blue-and-white costume very like Ashitaka's. She's contrasted with Kushana, a more aggressive, ruthless woman who



WHO'S INSPIRING WHOM? Miyazaki's San (above) bears the indomitability and wild-child origins of Gainax's Nadia (below), a heroine who is clearly modelled on the indomitability and mysterious origins of prior Miyazaki protagonists



nonetheless has great vision and charisma. In the film version, Kushana aims to burn down the poisonous jungle that covers the Earth, comparable to Eboshi's project of deforestation.

Some specific images find their way from NAUSICAA to MONONOKE. In the manga, there's a shocking scene where Nausicaa approaches a poisoned

soldier vomiting blood, puts her mouth to his and sucks the blood from his lungs. This is clearly echoed in the celebrated image of a feral San suckling blood from her wolf-mother's wound. Again, the psychic villain in the *Nausicaa* manga manifests himself covered in clammy black tar, which threatens to eat its victims. A similar, semi-sentient morass covers the animal gods in MONONOKE as they turn into demonic Tatari-gami.

MONONOKE contrasts two stages of human civilization through the Emishi (the tribe that Ashitaka comes from) and the people of Tataraba. The Emishi was a race of "barbarians," believed to be descended from Japan's original inhabitants, the people of the Jomon culture. The Jomon people weren't hunter-gatherers: it's debated whether they practiced agriculture, but they certainly didn't culti-

vate rice-fields like the migrants who drove them to the north and east of the island 20 centuries ago.

Jomon means "rope-mark," which also describes the marks on the people's pottery (which resemble, and perhaps were made by, ropes.) Such marks may have inspired the patterns on MONONOKE's title screen. Jomon-style marks also appear on the body of the Didarabocchi, the night-form of the Shishi-gami god.

Historically, the Emishi resisted the Japanese Emperors up to their defeat by Kammu (who established the shogun for that end) around 800 A.D. By imagining a last Emishi clan in medieval times, Miyazaki contrasts hunter-gatherer Japan with what he calls the "ambiguous, fluid" society of the Muro-machi era, a time when iron production jumped, swathes of trees were cut down, and people started to believe they could control nature. Iron is a requisite of advanced agriculture: axes and spades transform forest into farmland, supporting a higher population which itself means more deforestation and farming.

Understandably, it is the older people who are acceptable to MONONOKE's gods. Emishi elder Hii-Sama honors the boar-god even after it has attacked the village, and San is costumed with similar clay-earrings and bone necklace. The triangular tattoos on San's face are another reference to the Jomon culture, though in a case of textual overlay they also echo a medieval Japanese folktale of an ironworks and a princess with birthmarks on her face, which Miyazaki mentions reading.

APF

SIGNS OF NATURE: The night-god Didarabocchi carries the markings of the Emishi people.



Andrew Osmond

PRINCESS MONONOKE

Studio Ghibli

A select filmography

by MARINA
FRANTS

Since its foundation in 1985, Studio Ghibli has consistently produced some of Japan's most popular and critically acclaimed animated films. Unlike other Japanese animation studios, which rely mostly on TV series and direct-to-video releases to stay in business, Ghibli has specialized in theatrical films. Working without the time and budget constraints imposed by TV production schedules, the Ghibli animators (led by Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata) have produced well-written, visually stunning films that consistently beat Disney releases at the Japanese box office.

The short filmography below covers all of Ghibli's theatrical films. It does not include the studio's one made-for-TV movie, *UMI GA KIKOERU* (I CAN HEAR THE SEA), or Miyazaki and Takahata's work for other studios.

NAUSICAA OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND
1984; written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki (based on the manga by Miyazaki).

This is not, technically, a Studio Ghibli film, having been made at Topcraft Studio before Ghibli was established. However, it is pretty much impossible to talk about either Ghibli or Miyazaki without mentioning this film. Based on Miyazaki's epic manga series, the film contains all the archetypal elements of a Miyazaki film: an intelligent, resourceful heroine, spectacular flying scenes, a strong environmental theme, and a central conflict that's anything but black-and-white. The story is set in a post-apocalyptic future where a disaster known as the "Seven Days of Fire" has wiped out most of humanity and left the planet barely habitable. Nausicaa is the princess of a small kingdom who starts out fighting to keep her people from being de-

stroyed in a conflict between larger nations, and ends up saving the world from ecological disaster. The film's commercial and critical success led directly to the formation of Studio Ghibli.

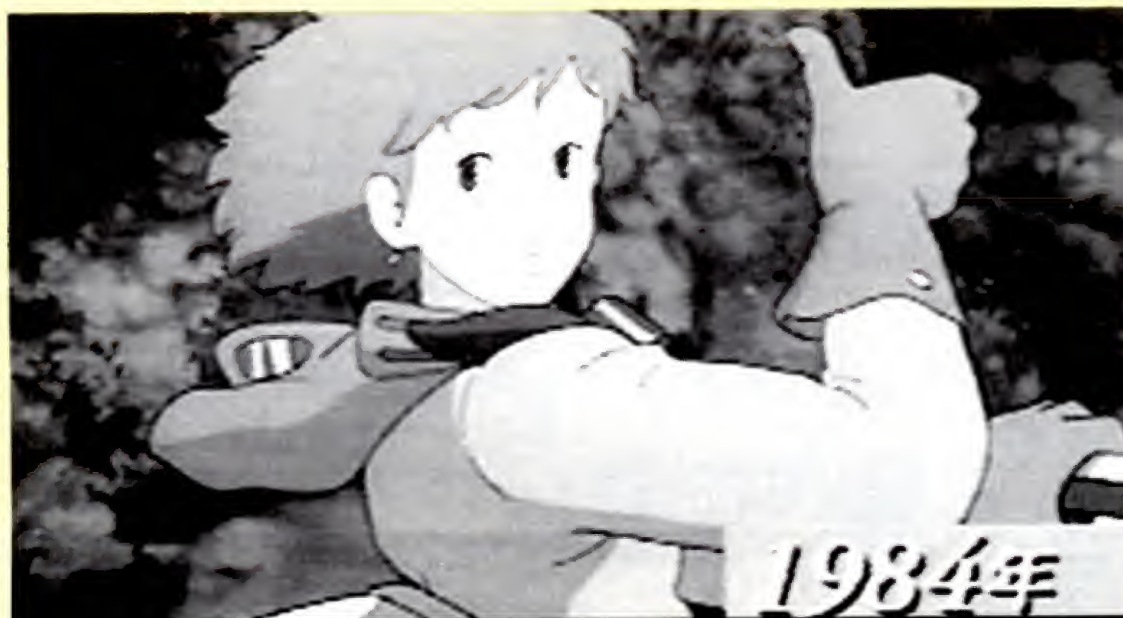
LAPUTA: CASTLE IN THE SKY
1986; written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki.

This was the first official Studio Ghibli release. Pazu, a young boy living and working in a depressed mining town in what appears to be an alternate 19th-century Europe, finds adventure when a mysterious girl

Max Fleischer-style robots, too.

MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO
1988; written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki.

Unlike *NAUSICAA* and *LAPUTA*, *TOTORO* is set in an identifiable time and place — Tokorazawa, Japan, in the late 1950's. Two girls, Satsuki and Mei, come to Tokorazawa with their father when their mother is hospitalized nearby. As they explore the huge, creaky old house that's become their new home, and the forest that surrounds it, they encounter a variety of magical creatures, including the Totoros of the title. The story manages the difficult task of being cute without being saccharin. The pace is rather leisurely compared to American kiddie movies, and there's not much by way of a linear plot — the tale unfolds as a series of loosely connected episodes, slowly establishing the warm relationship between the two sisters and their growing friendship with the Totoros. The animation is not quite as spectacular as in the previous two films, but the backgrounds do capture much of the beauty of the Japanese countryside.



DISTINCTIVE BREAKTHROUGH: NAUSICAA OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND became Miyazaki's first mega-hit, and the thematic and financial foundation upon which Studio Ghibli was built.

named Sheeta literally falls out of the sky and into his arms. Sheeta has a magic pendant that holds the secret to Laputa, a lost kingdom floating in the sky. A motley assortment of bad and not-so-bad guys are after the pendant, resulting in wild chases, hair-raising escapes, and (surprise!) more flying scenes. The animation has a more delicate touch than *NAUSICAA*, with many of the backdrops looking almost like fine watercolors. The industrial landscape of Pazu's town manages to be bleak and beautiful at the same time, and Laputa itself is just spectacular. Keep an eye out for the

GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES
1988; written and directed by Isao Takahata (based on the novel by Akiyuki Nosaka).

Set in Kobe, Japan in 1945, the film follows the efforts of two children, 14-year-old Seita and his four-year-old sister Setsuko, to survive the last days of World War II after their mother is killed in a fire-bombing raid. Takahata sticks very closely to his source material, adding only a couple of scenes at the beginning and end that don't appear in Nosaka's autobiographical novel. Despite occasional touches of humor, the film is un-

relentingly tragic, sometimes difficult to watch, but well worth the effort. In 1994, an English-language version was screened at the Chicago International Children's Film Festival, where it won two awards.

KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE

1989; written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki (based on the novel by Kadono Eiko).

Thirteen-year-old Kiki is training to be a witch under the tutelage of her mother. As part of that training, she must leave home and live on her own for a year, using her magic skills to make a living. Unfortunately, Kiki has not been too diligent in her studies, and her only skill is flying on a broom.

Taeko, a young office worker living in Tokyo in 1982, goes to spend a vacation with some relatives in the country. The trip makes her feel nostalgic for the small-town life of her childhood, and the rest of the film flips back and forth between 1966 and 1982 as the adult Taeko sorts through her memories and tries to decide what she wants to do with her life.



PORCO ROSSO

1992; written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki (based on the manga *The Age of the Flying Boat* by Miyazaki).

Miyazaki is a lifelong aviation buff, and it shows in his movies. Airships, planes,

When she finds the seaside town of her dreams, she starts a flying delivery service. This is one of the most beautifully animated of the Ghibli films, like an Impressionist painting come to life, with detailed, dynamic backgrounds and elaborate, perfectly choreographed crowd scenes. Like *TO TORO*, the story is light and episodic, relying on character and atmosphere rather than conflict to sustain audience interest, though an airship crash at the climax does generate some suspense.

gliders, and other flying contraptions show up in film after film, often providing some of the most spectacular scenes. This film in particular is a fine showcase for his obsession. The hero is an Italian pilot and World War I veteran who quits the Air Force in disgust at the rise of Fascism in his country, and becomes a flying bounty hunter. Oh, and he happens to be a talking pig.

RACCOON WAR (TANUKI WAR, POM POKO)

1994; written and directed by Isao Takahata.

"Tanuki," as they are called in Japanese, are not really raccoons, but similar-

looking animals native to Asia. In folklore, they are shape-changing tricksters, mischievous but usually harmless. In this film they are a vanishing folk, pushed toward extinction by the destruction of their habitat. A tribe of Tanuki band together in an attempt to stop a government construction project. They mount

an escalating campaign of tricks and illusions, culminating in one long, spectacular magical parade designed to alert the humans to what they're about to destroy. Despite being populated almost exclusively by cute, furry animals, the film is not geared mainly to children. It is witty, visually stunning, sometimes violent, and delivers its ecological message strongly but with a minimum of preaching. It has more in common with *Watership Down* than with the Disney cartoons it inevitably gets compared to. *POM POKO* was Japan's entry for the Academy Awards in the Best Foreign Language Film category, but failed to get a nomination.

WHISPER OF THE HEART

1995; directed by Yoshifumi Kondo, screenplay by Hayao Miyazaki (based on the manga by Aoi Hiragi).



The artist's view of the world becomes the focus of this feature, about a teenage girl trying to write a fantasy story.

PRINCESS MONONOKE, 1997; written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki.

MY NEIGHBORS THE YAMADAS
Release forthcoming; directed by Isao Takahata (based on the comic strip by Hiseichi Ishii).

A slice-of-life comedy of contemporary Japan, *YAMADAS* focuses on the adventures of the titular, off-beat family. In contrast to the lavish *MONONOKE*, it may replicate the primitivist style of its source comic strip.

AFQ

LOOKING FORWARD TO LOOKING BACK: Upcoming from the Disney deal: *CASTLE IN THE SKY* (upper right) and *PORCO ROSSO* (above). Still a question mark: *WHISPER OF THE HEART* (right) and *POM POKO* (below).



What the Fakk2

Kevin Eastman comes out of his shell and brings audiences the long-awaited HEAVY METAL sequel.

by DAVID
EVANS

When comic book wizard and *Ninja Turtles* co-creator Kevin Eastman was just a teenager growing up in the cold, forbidding land of Maine, he always had two obstacles to overcome if he wanted to get his hot little hands around his favorite publication: *Heavy Metal* magazine. First, he had to find a retail bookstore that was open-minded enough to carry an illustrated, comic book-like magazine noted for its weird, exotic storytelling style, its nude renderings of anatomically astounding women, men, and monsters, and, most of all, its raw, graphic portrayal of violence on a mind-bending scale. These attributes kept it out of those bookstores whose owners saw the magazine as "pornographic." Second, if Eastman could find a store that carried it, he'd then have to prove that he was actually old enough to purchase it — the eternal teen nightmare.

Mr. Eastman has come a long way. Seven years ago, wealthy from "Turtle Mania" he purchased the failing magazine. Now his name appears on the masthead under the title of Publisher and Editor-in-Chief.

One of the things that drew Eastman to buy the magazine was its "post-apocalyptic" style of storytelling. "96% of the material in the magazine is European content. So what we publish in the magazine is indicative of the trends that are popular in Europe, and that post-apocalyptic theme did very well. I like the possibilities within the post-apocalyptic, because you can create a much wider

variety of avenues. Anything can happen — who's to say that there wouldn't be this kind of mutant or that kind of deviant life form or an environment where a character would evolve in bizarre, even repulsive ways? It allows us to creatively explore a lot of different territories."

So the question is: what does a super-successful artist do once he takes over the helm of the legendary *Heavy Metal*, the magazine that spawned the cult-classic animated movie of the same name, released over 15 years ago? Answer: you make a sequel that measures up, if not surpasses, the original. Hence, HEAVY METAL: FAKK2, a new animated feature currently in production at Cine Group animation in Montreal and Munich's Trixter Studio.

What does FAKK2 mean? It's an acronym, standing for Federation Assigned Kenogenic Killzone to the Second Power, which in turn is shorthand for a planet-spanning, artificial biohazard that is intentionally fatal to all carbon-based life forms (that means you, buddy). It was constructed, Eastman explained, as a vast wall of death that both conceals the heroine's homeworld and protects it from interstellar pirates and other, would-be attackers. Later in the story, after the heroine embarks on her mission of vengeance against interstellar villain Lord Tyler, she takes the name of Fakk2 for herself. Similar to the goddess Shiva of Hindu mythology, she becomes death itself.

The story of the making of Fakk2, said Eastman, goes back all the way to the first

HEAVY METAL movie. "The first one was a series of short stories pulled directly from the pages of the magazine. Some were created by the studio or artists they had hired. We ended up with seven or eight interconnected stories that orbited around the star of the last story, the warrior woman, Tarna." Yet, he said, FAKK2 will be one, complete story, instead of a string of episodes. "We've gotten letters from half the fans saying that they liked the various stories, that it gave them variety. But the other half preferred the Tarna sequence above and beyond all the others." Taking the fan's comments to heart, Eastman decided to create a movie based on a Tarna-like character, who would be mythic, god-like and, most of all, vengeance-driven.

The character of Fakk2 never actually appeared in the pages of *Heavy Metal*. "I always wanted to do a strong, female superhero character of my own," explained Eastman. "I started developing [FAKK2] as we looked at possible story lines for HEAVY METAL 2. I had already done this 128-page graphic novel called *The Melting Pot*, which I did with another artist, Simon Bisley."

He got the idea for *The Melting Pot* — a story he calls "a study in the questions of metaphysics" — while flying over the country in a jet. Looking down at the land below, he overheard some passengers talking about a "crazy religious uprising in the Middle East, where people were getting killed and maimed."

"What if we all found out that we were



CAN WE RETHINK OUR STAND ON GUN CONTROL?: Julie Strain, graphically transformed into Fakk2, makes even the heaviest armaments look like fashion accessories

brought here by someone else. My intent was to present this gross, disgusting creature who's a billion-plus years old and who journeys through the cosmos in his Godship. He was supposed to be just watching — he'd seen planets being born and he'd gone through so many transitions that he got a little twisted and decided to try an experiment: he gathers millions of people from thousands of worlds, selecting the worst representatives of each. He selects thieves, murders, rapists, thinking that they're all a product of their environment and, if he took these people and placed them on this Garden of Eden, they could all biologically co-exist. With that set-up and a prophecy of his return to judge them some day in the future, these multiple species would eventually create a utopian society. Yet the result is a catastrophe of epic proportions. And, when he does return, the people are so repulsed that it sets off Armageddon."

But that wasn't enough to make the story work; there was an element missing. The sequel became a shelved project for five years until someone came along who would change Eastman's life forever. That person was Julie Strain, actress, model, and now

Eastman's wife.

Standing a towering six-foot-one (six-foot-eight in her high-heeled boots) with an amazon-like body and a long mane of beautiful, black hair, one can't help but see Strain as an archetype for a superheroine. Yet, Eastman was even more impressed by her strong personal qualities: her heart; her compassion; and her intelligence. "You're my superhero," said Eastman to Strain. "You're going to be the heroine of this movie." With Eastman's artistic ability and Strain's movie business savvy, they pitched the concept and raised \$15 million between Columbia TriStar Pictures and CineGroup Montreal. The *HEAVY METAL* sequel was once again on track.

Taking *The Melting Pot* and his idea for a Tarna-like superheroine, Eastman began to fuse the two concepts together. This became the storyline for *HEAVY METAL: FAKK2*. Eastman credited director George Unger for his contributions to the final screenplay, bringing together elements that the artist did not originally see. Now the story has a strong protagonist that Eastman defined as "a new legend, a new god."

"The story now revolves around these

mortals who come across this substance that allows them to become immortal for a period of time, for as long as they have this substance. Now, if you're a mortal put into that kind of situation, and you're the wrong kind of mortal, you could almost think of yourself as godlike. So you've got false gods out there fucking with the universe: there they are bestowing their wisdom on multiple worlds, creating, twisting whole species into something they were never meant to be."

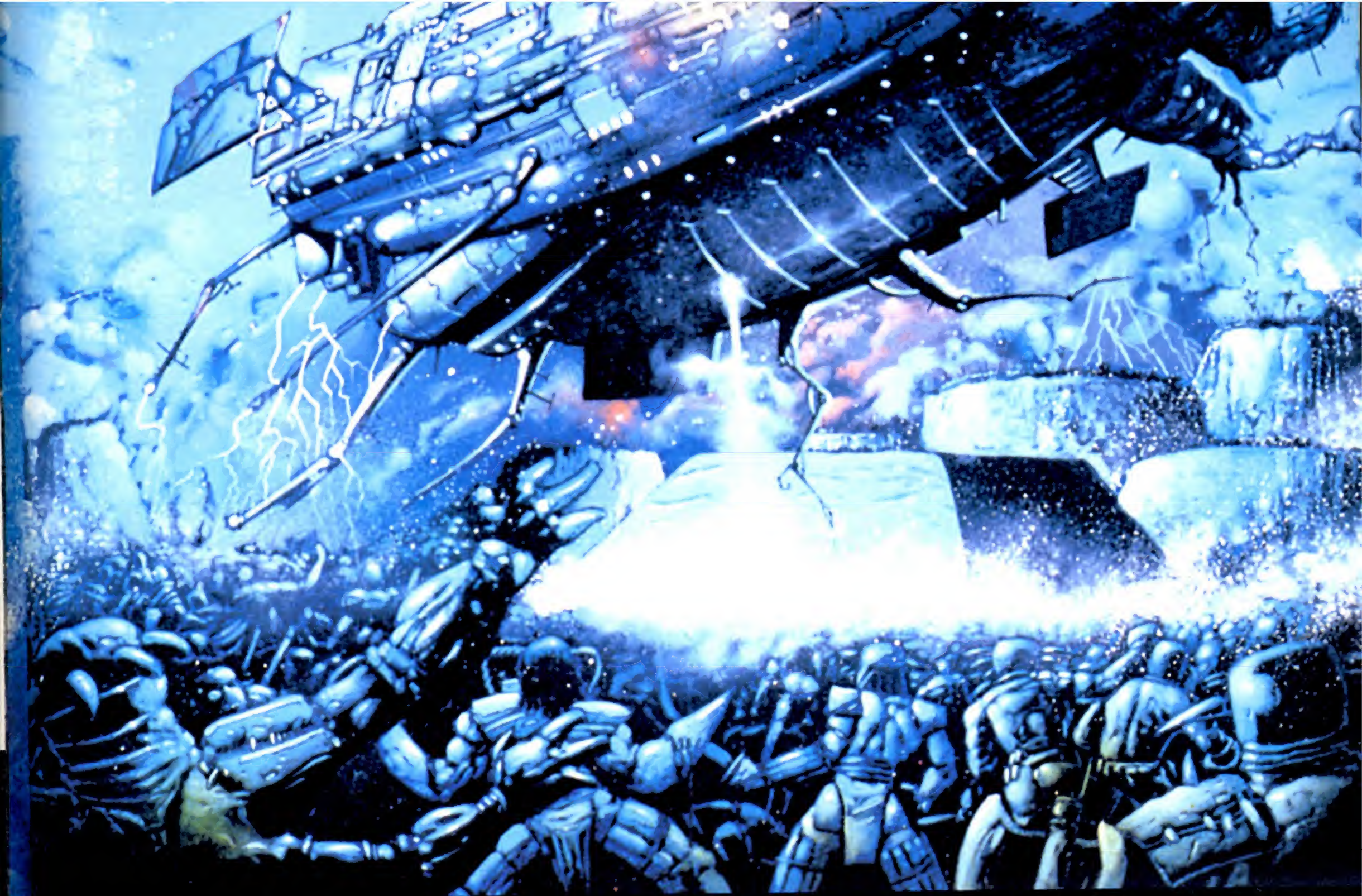
Eastman explained that, for him, real villainy stands on a fine line between genius and insanity: insanity to conceive of evil, and genius to implement such evil. Eastman finds himself a reluctant believer in the concept of good and evil, but he also sees a "million" shades of gray in between.

"When these gods finally reach their end, [it takes] someone who's pure of mind and true of spirit to take their place and correct the damage. [In *FAKK2*,] it's a mortal woman with the wisdom and understanding of a goddess."

How does Eastman define God? "I don't believe in what a TV evangelist calls God," he said. "I do believe in being a good person and doing the right thing, helping your

LET'S BLOW THIS JOINT: As a teen, Kevin Eastman loved the grand vision and unabashed story-telling style of *Heavy Metal* magazine. Now leveraging his success as co-creator of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, he's striving to bring the same, mind-blowing feel to *HEAVY METAL: FAKK2*.





PROFANE WRATH: Immortality, omniscience, and power on a galactic scale are the prizes at stake in FAKK2, a film that doesn't let its big-think themes get in the way of eye-popping imagery.

brothers and sisters and people in general, and trying to be the best person you can be.

"[Julie Strain's Fakk2] becomes a goddess, in the sense that Greek legend would believe Athena was a goddess. She gave birth to the gods and did X, Y and Z and created things that change the lives of poor, mortal man.

"In a way similar to the Tarna character in the first movie, Fakk2, after seeing her family, community, and world ripped apart by the villains, is at first motivated by pure vengeance. As the story progresses and Fakk2 journeys throughout space, she discovers that her life has been forewritten and foretold. She knows that she must rise above vengeance and assume the role of a goddess to make a difference in the universe."

Eastman has an attraction for strong female leads, such as the one Geena Davis played in *THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT*. He also mentioned the Sarah Conner character of the first *TERMINATOR* movie. "She was a waitress who becomes the mother of the man who would ultimately save the human species from extinction by machines. I loved that aspect of the story, seeing the character grow and having the audience grow with it. We wanted to show a similar

kind of pattern there."

Eastman loves the epic movies of the late-'50s: *SPARTACUS*, *BEN-HUR*, *CLEOPATRA*. He also admires Mel Gibson's *BRAVEHEART*, in which an army of thousands of Scottish warriors was simulated with a mere 1500 British soldiers. "In all those movies," said Eastman, "you felt like you were within the scene and within that space of time, finding out what that kind of fight would be like — and it was brutal." To replicate the scope of these lives-action role-models, FAKK2 is being filmed in wide-screen.

"At the same time," Eastman continued, "[working in the] medium of animation, we face a tough problem: we need to create a film [budgeted at] \$15 million that can compete with an \$80 million blockbuster, with all of the bells and whistles and special effects. The exciting part about that is that we should be able to create vast battle scenes of Cecil B. DeMille, epic proportions. It's tough to draw but we've got the craft to make the story tremendous and legendary. All we can hope and know is that it can be done. It's just a matter of hiring 2000 animators to draw one million barbarians beating the shit out of each other for 20 minutes.

"Because of the advantages of digital processing and digital ink and paint systems, we're taking fully painted backgrounds and intertwining them with CGI graphics that allow a lot more detail in animation. You'll have blood, stains and dirt, things that were previously impossible to accomplish. Hopefully, this is something that people will want to see on the big screen.

"We've previously discussed and agreed with Columbia TriStar and the Montreal-based CineGroup on two things. There definitely will be two versions: a hard PG-13 edition that would be screened in middle America. Then, for direct-video, an additional 10 minutes will be added that would probably put the movie into an R-rating."

Further locking the film into its *HEAVY METAL* demographic will be the casting of leather-rocker Billy Idol as Fakk2's nemesis, Lord Tyler (nice day for a *White Wedding* indeed). Plans are to have the film — long delayed after numerous, stalled production deals — hitting the nation's multiplexes sometime between August and October. After that, only time and the boxoffice will tell if its another 20 years before FAKK3.

AFQ



FAKK2

Julie Strain

THE GODESS AS DEATH ITSELF: FAKK2 presents Julie Strain as a deadly avenger working her way towards divinity (below). LEFT: An image of Julie Strain. RIGHT: In the flesh.



Lethal on the surface, but with an underlying sense of humor: this is how model, actress, and anime icon Julie Strain likes it. She could care less what others think. "People who don't like me don't have to look, and I won't force myself on them," said Strain. "I'm 36 years old and I work out harder than you can imagine. There are days that I crawl into bed at noon because I'm so tired. But I do it so when I put on a bikini, I know that the fans aren't going to be disappointed."

With such titles as **BIKINI SQUAD**, **BLOOD SURF** and **TEMPTRESS**, the actress has quickly earned the honor of "Queen of the B's." With her statuesque, six-foot-one-inch-frame, goddess-like good looks and penchant for tight-fitting and/or low-cut and/or skimpy outfits, she's become an action heroine unlike any other.

Strain has marketed herself and her career very wisely with her husband, Kevin Eastman (well-known in comic circles as the creator of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles). Her image not only adorns movie screens, but CD-ROMs, books, and innumerable pieces of merchandise, from Zippo lighters to coffee mugs. "It was kind of like I built the house before I moved into it with that title," added Strain. "But now I've got the rooms full and I can document everything that I said that I was."

Next summer that title will fit even more snugly, as Julie lends her voice and image to the animated realm, with the sequel, **HEAVY METAL: FAKK2** (written and produced by husband Eastman). As the main character, Strain will portray Julia, a lone vigilante who takes on the evil Lord Tyler in order to save the universe. According to Strain, the animated science fiction tale will be more than just explosions and visual effects, but will attempt to tackle some weighty issues. "I have no doubt in my mind that people who don't even want to like Julie Strain, or don't want to like animation, are really going

to be touched by this movie. Maybe not like **TITANIC**, but it's going to touch you. You're not going to leave it, forget it and walk on to something else, you're really going to think about the story line and 'What if these things could really happen?'"

A native of California, Strain's career kicked into high gear when the young model posed for *Penthouse* and became that magazine's "Pet of the Year" in 1993. She wisely parlayed that title into a movie career, and then into a business, in which the one product sold was herself.

Then, in 1994, while at a signing at a California comic book store, Strain met Eastman. The two fell in love and married shortly thereafter. They became not only a couple, but co-workers as well. "We kind of have each other's speeches down and we can finish each other's sentences," said Strain. "Our desks are right next to each other, so we can be calling on outgoing lines, have the fax going, the service going, someone calling downstairs. It's really like Grand Central Station sometimes, but we do it in tandem and we love it."

The two have also stoked the flames of adoring Julie fans, not only through canny marketing, but by publishing Strain's autobiography, *Six Foot One and Worth the Climb*. The book has been a favorite of insatiable devotees, who have also made Julie one of the darlings of the Internet. "All these people say, 'Do you mind if we put you on our web site?' and I say, 'Sure, here are some free pictures,'" laughed Strain. "I just let people use my image and I think that's what's helped a lot. A lot of people get bitchy and say, 'I'm going to police the Internet! I don't want my pictures on anyone else's site!'"

Strain's is determined to enjoy her fame with a sly wink. As for her legions of fans, Julie's stance is generous. "When you're a celebrity, you're a piece of cake and everybody can have a slice. If you keep it all to yourself, you're going to have one slice and throw the rest out. If I'm a piece of cake, that's what I'll give them. I'll stuff 'em 'til they're 600 pounds!" **AFQ**



by **MIKE LYONS**

BATTLE OF THE PLANETS

In the late seventies, a GATCHAMAN by any other name still had bird-garbed heroes and transforming robots (but no deaths!)

by ANDREW
OSMOND

Battle of the Planets! G-Force... Princess... Mark... Keyop... Tiny... Jason... and watching over them from Center Neptune, their computerized coordinator 7-Zark-7... Watching, warning against surprise attacks by alien galaxies beyond space [sic]... Fearless young orphans, protecting Earth's entire galaxy... Always five, acting as one... Dedicated, inseparable, invincible..."

Sound familiar? Today, we're all too used to Japanese series where teams of youngsters morph (or in BATTLE's case, "Transmute!") into superheroes to KO monsters from beyond the stars. There's nothing radical about weird aliens, ninjakicking good-guys or spaceships that split into their component parts on command. But to a generation of youngsters in the late '70s, all this was new; and thanks to anime's freedom, BATTLE had none of the model sets or rubber monsters of its live-action counterparts.

BATTLE came to the West in 1978, courtesy of Sandy Frank, an American game show distributor whom most viewers assumed created the show. In fact, Frank had spent \$4.5 million buying and editing a six-year-old anime series called KAGAKU NINJATAI GATCHAMAN (SCIENCE NINJA TEAM GATCHAMAN), produced by the Tokyo animator Tatsunoko. Undoubtedly, Frank's main motive was to cash in on the STAR WARS vogue—the BATTLE publicity described the show as "an action-filled, fully-animated, SF series that

pits good against evil, with special effects, imaginative futuristic concepts and exciting, dramatic perspectives that only the most modern and dedicated animation can achieve."

The set-up was easy to follow. Each week, the "fearless young orphans" of G-Force would battle the latest Earth-conquering scheme of Zoltar, a masked, lip-sticked, maniacal ruler of the dying planet Spectra. Most of Zoltar's projects involved giant, robotized monsters whose sole unifying feature was they had cool designs: typical examples included outsized armadillos, gargantuan Gila monsters and huge flying mummies (musta cost a fortune in gauze). Kids who'd seen Japanese monster matinees had instant déjà vu. Some of the scraps took place on Earth, others in outer space (though the "alien planets" often had suspiciously Earthlike landmarks).

On the angels' side, G-Force was led by Mark Venture, a noble, square-jawed and rather dull hero at odds with his rebellious colleague, Jason. (Jason reflected viewer consensus by wanting instant, all-out attacks on every new monster, while Mark played cautious strategist.) Mediating between the two was the lovely Princess (another STAR WARS echo), a guitar-playing beauty with the hots for Mark, and her diminutive friend Keyop, a laboratory-grown creation who spoke gibberish every four words in five. Keyop shared comic relief duties with Tiny, the affable, overweight pilot of G-Force's

fighter plane, the Phoenix.

The team members had their own vehicles: a fighter plane for Mark, a racing car for Jason, a motorbike for Princess, and an orange buggy with retro-jets for Keyop. The team's main attack weapons were nifty—but supposedly non-lethal—flying darts; and in a pinch (just about every show), G-Force spun on each other's shoulders to create devastating whirlwinds. But the team's most memorable asset was the Phoenix itself, which regularly transmogrified into a vast flaming bird to burn enemy ships to cinders. (Why the Phoenix crew wasn't incinerated in the process was never explained.)

G-Force had two surrogate "parents:" the icily stern Dr Anderson, who gave the team briefings each week, and the motherly 7-Zark-7, an R2-like 'droid voiced by MR. ED's ol' buddy Alan Young, who oversaw their adventures and gave running commentaries for viewers. His rambling monologues, mainly on how he cared for G-Force and longed to join them, were either charming or insufferable depending on whether you'd seen the original anime. Zark was later joined by robot dog 1-Rover-1 and sultry computer Susan. On the other side, Zoltar's mentor was the Great Spirit (both baddies seemingly voiced by the same actor), a bird-faced, purple-blue alien with yellow eyes, floating against psychedelic backdrops.

BATTLE is the anime which most divides mainstream viewers from in-the-know

fans. The former remember it as quite exciting and powerful for children's television — and, in its defense it often was: packed with action, stylish designs, great music (the bombastic theme-tune was an improvement on the Japanese original) and effective plots, often focused on civilians in peril. **BATTLE** also benefited from surprisingly good voice-acting by a cast of animation veterans.

Ex-disc jockey Casey Kasem (Mark) had already achieved immortality as Shaggy, the cowardly hipster in **SCOOBY DOO**, as well as voicing Robin in numerous, pre-Dark-Knight **BATMAN** shows. Janet Waldo (Princess) voiced Judy Jetson and Penelope Pitstop in **THE JETSONS** and **WACKY RACES**, respectively, while comedian Ronnie Schell (Jason) was one of the voices in a **SCOOBY DOO** rip-off called **GOOBER AND THE GHOST-CHASERS** (it's a gig). Keye Luke (Zoltar) was well known to chop-sockey fans as the sensei Master Po in the live-action **KUNG FU**. Alan Young later found fame as Scrooge in Disney's **DUCK TALES**, while Alan Dinehart, who voiced Tiny and Dr. Anderson, was a long time Hanna-Barbera employee, and directed the cast.

BATTLE's executive producer and head writer, Jameson Brewer, was the most notable name of all, having worked on Disney classics **PINOCCHIO** and **FANTASIA**, and dozens of other films. Yet his script "revisions" found little favor with anime fans. It was not so much that the original **GATCHAMAN** was completely changed—although the villains in **GATCHAMAN** were earthbound, while 7-Zark-7 didn't even exist. More damning, in fans' eyes, was that **BATTLE** was clumsily cut to remove scenes of death or violence. While the original **GATCHAMAN** was mild by the standards of today's animes, the Japanese series was still replete with shootings, fist-fights and monsters trampling or frying civilians. All this was perceived as "no-go" for **BATTLE**, though a couple of violent deaths slipped through in later episodes.

Today, much of **BATTLE**'s fun comes from spotting the joins, especially the mysterious, action non-sequiturs—"Where did the bad guy go?"—when things get too nasty. It's also amusing to catch script changes—fighter planes are always "unmanned," ruined cities have been handily evacuated and, contrary to screen evidence, G-Force's weapons only stun the enemy. Perhaps the worst revision occurs in the pivotal two-parter "The Sky is Falling," in which fighter ace Captain Cronos, who aided G-Force in several stories, dramatically reveals himself as Mark's father. The story ended with Cronos blowing himself up to save Earth—only, in a blatantly tacked-on ending, to have 7-Zark-7 announce that Cronos escaped at the last second (causing cries of "Foul!" from fans worldwide).

G-Force's fate was never revealed to Western viewers. The original **GATCHA-**

MAN climaxed with Condor Joe (the Jason character) going AWOL to discover Katse's (Zoltar's) base in the Himalayas. Katse, it transpired, was a genetically-engineered hermaphrodite who swapped genders on a regular basis (are you beginning to understand why this didn't make it to U.S. sets?). Jason was captured and tortured to death, but not before foiling Katse's master plan. The story closed with the Great Spirit escaping and Katse throwing himself to his doom in a lava pit. Only that wasn't the end: **GATCHAMAN 2** (which involved Jason's resurrection) followed in 1978, the same year **BATTLE** debuted in the West, while **GATCHAMAN FIGHTER** (1979) took the episode-count to 200. In the '90s, Tatsunoko remade the origi-

nal series in a glossy, three-part OVA, released in America by Urban Vision.

Western companies have continued to tamper with **GATCHAMAN**. Turner's **G-FORCE: GUARDIANS OF SPACE** found favor with purists by losing Zark and incorporating more—though by no means all—of the violence, but was hampered by bad acting and worse scripts (the heroes were given unbelievably cheesy names like "Ace Goodheart" and "Dirk Daring.") In the '90s, Saban's **EAGLE RIDERS**—remaking **GATCHAMAN 2**—died from low-ratings and now-outmoded animation. Yet for many young viewers, **BATTLE OF THE PLANETS**, warts and all, was the true golden age of anime.

APQ



THEY'VE GIVEN YOU A COSTUME, AND TAKEN AWAY YOUR NAME: BOTP's Mark Venture... uhh. Ace Goodheart... errr... Oh, hell... Whoever that is, he's now appearing on Cartoon Network.

TARZAN

Noble primitive or most righteous tree-surfer?
The classic ape-man gets a modern spin
in Disney's newest feature.

by MIKE
LYONS

Footage. Talk to the animators who worked on Disney's latest feature, *TARZAN* (opening June 19) and that's the one word that continually comes up. Since film is measured in feet, "footage" is the animation term for the amount of completed work a person or department creates each week.

Footage is usually used as a barometer for how production is moving along, but on *TARZAN*, it meant freedom. Unlike recent Disney animated features that used quicker cuts and rat-a-tat production numbers, the animators on *TARZAN* were given the luxury of time for this latest take on the legendary ape-man. "This film probably has the longest scenes of any Disney film," said Randy Haycock, supervising animator for *TARZAN*'s villain, Clayton. "Many times we've gotten caught up in the idea that a scene was getting too long or slow. But we discovered that this film is just so much about character. We had to give the characters time to relate to each other."

"We're allowing the characters to be characters," noted Mike Surrey, who serves as supervising animator for the gorilla sidekick, Terk. "People are going to see the characters through acting."

"I equate it to *BAMBI*," added animator Glen Keane, who brings his masterly touch to *TARZAN*'s title character. "There was a film where they allowed Bambi, or the mother deer, to walk, lift their head, then have this attitude that showed they were extremely alert, all of their nerves were taut and they were receiving information. The audience was fascinated as it watched this

deer go through this very naturalistic movement. Nothing else happens on the screen for long periods of time, you're just following the movements of a deer. I felt that with *Tarzan*, that kind of action would be fascinating."

The opportunity to push characters' emotions and go the extra "beat" in a scene is just one of the many dynamics in

ZAN tells the tale of a human infant, orphaned in the wilds of the jungle and raised by a family of gorillas. Tarzan matures into adulthood, adapting the prowess and cunning of a jungle animal.

The ape-man's life changes when other humans come into the jungle, via an expedition led by the renowned Professor Porter and his daughter, Jane. Also part of the expedition is Clayton, a big game hunter who befriends Tarzan, but only for insidious reasons. The hunter has plans to capture apes and ship them to Europe for sale. Clayton's actions set up a conflict within Tarzan, as he is torn between the jungle family he feels he has betrayed and this new human family that has betrayed him.

Clayton's two-faced personality is a different spin on the stereotypical "Disney villain." As such, the character was one of the toughest to grasp during the film's production. "I think that Tarzan is his own villain," said Kevin Lima (director, *A GOOFY MOVIE*), who co-directed *TARZAN* with Chris Buck, a supervising animator making his directorial debut. "He betrays his family

in this film by becoming a human and leading the villains back to his family. So, finding a way to have an 'external villain' was difficult."

"We thought, 'Wouldn't it be interesting if we didn't reveal Clayton's villainy until the second act?'" said Buck. "Usually, in every film that we've done, the villain has been there from the first scene, saying, 'I'm going to rule the world!'"

Clayton's supervising animator, Randy Haycock remembered, "We went for a long



THE WOMEN IN THE APE-MAN'S LIFE: Testing Tarzan's loyalties is a conflict between his simian mother, Kala (lower right) and his human love, Jane (above). **UPPER RIGHT:** Feral sentence: Glen Keane's intensely cool Tarzan.

TARZAN that the studio hopes will make it another turning point for the medium, as well as a continuing break from the standard formula. "Each project is different," said *TARZAN*'s producer Bonnie Arnold. "While Disney does have a lot of knowledge about animation, there's still a lot to be explored, and new people to work with."

Taking its inspirations and intent from Edgar Rice Burroughs original novel (with some necessary liberties), Disney's *TAR-*



time not knowing who Clayton was and how he fit into the story and related to the other characters." Then came inspiration in the burly form of British actor Brian Blessed (Little John in *ROBIN HOOD: PRINCE OF THIEVES*) whose suave demeanor became the guiding force for Clayton's personality. "We had a meeting and Brian's name came up," continued Haycock, "and we all started talking about how charming he was. The problem with Clayton, at that point, was that he wasn't very interesting. I said, 'Well, let's put more of Brian into him.'"

In addition to Blessed, other voice actors included Glenn Close as Kala, Tarzan's adoptive gorilla mother, Minnie Driver as Jane, Rosie O'Donnell as the wiseacre gorilla, Terk, Wayne Knight (*SEINFELD*'s Newman) as Tantor, a neurotic elephant, Lance Henriksen (TV's *MILLENNIUM*) as Kerchak, the powerful leader of the gorilla clan, Nigel Hawthorne (*THE MADNESS OF KING GEORGE*) as Porter and Tony Goldwyn (*GHOST*) as Tarzan.

In what is probably Disney's largest imprint on the jungle fable, the animals in *TARZAN* do indeed talk. Following a tradition started with *BAMBI* and carried through to *THE LION KING*, the animators closely observed animals—in this case apes—through nature documentaries, sketching trips to the zoo, and even a visit to the studio by a young chimp. "I scared the apes at the zoo," laughed Russ Edmonds, supervising animator for Kala. "Everyone else tried to yell at them and throw popcorn at them to get their attention. But, I shifted side-to-side and bent down on my knuckles and they started watching me and I watched them back. I needed to do that so that I could relate to my character."

"We kept sending everyone back to study the animals," said Lima. "No matter how caricatured the character may seem in its still drawing, it still had to move like a real animal."

Designing the look and creating the movements of the animals was one thing, doing the same for Tarzan, the character, was something else. For Glen Keane it

meant crafting a protagonist who was neither too human nor all animal. "When Tarzan is just standing there as a human, if you just drew him completely civilized, that didn't feel right," said Keane, adding, "If you took the pose and turned his shoulders a little and kept the animal side, it felt very natural."

Keane blended simian, cat-like, and human movements together into the character, but was striving to create a Tarzan that wasn't just another chest-thumping vine-swinging. Observing his teenage son's love of skateboarding, Keane decided to use some of those daredevil moves in the character. "Glen felt that if Tarzan was growing up in this day and age, he'd be a candidate for the extreme sports games," said producer Arnold, "because he's a real athlete who can do these death-defying stunts."

Arnold, along with directors Lima and Buck, gave Keane the freedom he needed to shape the title character, with one restriction: he couldn't sing. No musical numbers about how great life in the jungle is, no ape-man-centered show-stoppers, no love ballads while swinging on the vines. "It was a real conscious decision to move away from the Broadway formula of our past films," admitted Lima. "We knew four years ago [when the film's production began] that there were going to be three more Broadway-based films, so we said, 'Let's try to do something a little different.'"

The filmmakers had another idea for how to use music in *TARZAN*, an idea inspired by *TOY STORY*'s use of Randy Newman's songs over the soundtrack as a musical narrative. Arnold, who also produced *TOY STORY*, said, "The idea is the same, but to be honest, I think in *TARZAN* it's a little more realized. It's integrated more in this film. In *TOY STORY*, we only had three songs and in this movie we have five." The five songs are

written and performed by none other than Phil Collins, whose unique sense of percussion perfectly folded into this tale of the jungle. "At different points, when the songs kick in, they're dealing on a different level," said Lima. "They're expressing the inner voice of Tarzan."

TARZAN will also break new ground in the way computer-generated imagery (CGI) is merged with traditional animation. Utilizing a new computer system entitled "Deep Canvas," the filmmakers were able to create three-dimensional moving backgrounds that give the illusion of a live-action, steady-cam shot, while never losing the qualities of a hand-created painting. With "Deep Canvas," an artist paints a background, but with a stylus (a mouse-like pen) instead of a brush, and a small, flat, "digitizer tablet" for a canvas. Each one of the artist's strokes is recorded by the computer. "We can re-generate the exact painting, pixel for pixel," said Eric Daniels, head of CGI on *TARZAN*, who also helped create the new software. "It's actually the same painting that the artist created, but we can re-generate it however many times we want."

Even with such technological advances, *TARZAN*, like all Disney's films, is rooted in something stronger, something that couldn't be measured in footage. "It's all about the characters," said Ken Duncan, supervising animator for Jane. "From *SNOW WHITE* on, what's nice is that all the [Disney studio's] characters are really well developed. Sometimes there's a new style or a 3-D background, but characters are still at the core of these films."

AFQ



DON'T GO THERE, GIRL: DOES COOL DEVICES ISLAND HOLIDAY GO TOO FAR?

TODD
FRENCH

One of the sad things about many contemporary works of dark *cinefantastique* is that they seldom go far enough. Timidity reigns supreme in the marketplace, causing filmmakers to shy away from exploring the most extreme, unfettered realms of Dionysian, *schadeunfreud*, taboo material.

Conversely, one of the refreshing things about Japanese anime is its tendency to hold nothing back, the refusal to cater to occidental notions of pre-merchandised, p.c. pap. In the last few decades, Japanese animators have treated American cineastes to horrific, hard-core tales of black, beyond-noir anti-heroes and heroines, sexually rapacious gods, demons, monsters and aliens — tales with every perversion and misogynistic outrage laid out in exquisite, graphic detail. Lopped limbs, ruptured hymens, randy tentacles, and torrents and torrents of fluids of every kind are lovingly limned in the most ravishing Technicolor palette, finding beauty in the Truly Hateful, as it were. To find a homegrown equivalent to this material, one would have to scope the works of such full-throttle, "splatterpunk" writers as Edward Lee and John Pelan, or the graphic adult comic-book creations of Tim Vigil. Heavy metal could also be cited as another influence in shaping adult manga's visuals and attitudes.

However, jaded as many anime buffs may be, there comes the occasional flabbergasting, *outré* one-off that makes the reviewer do the proverbial double-take and wonder, who the hell are these things made for, and why am I watching them? Case in point: Akira Nishimori's COOL DEVICES of-

fering, "Kirei."

COOL DEVICES is an ongoing, hard-core, episodic adult OVA series with the prurient material consisting of a series of fairly standard B&D black-outs, in which anatomically exaggerated feminine ideals of virginal purity undergo graphic sexual (sometimes sadistic) subjugation at the hands of aggressors of both sexes. Sort of a 'toon-style *Wonderful World of O*. As such, it offers little that hasn't been seen in standard adult anime, with the substitution of latex for school uniforms.



"I'M BEING RAPED AND I'M ENJOYING IT!": You don't have to be Susan Brownmiller to feel that, in its unyielding depiction of women sexually subjugated and ultimately exterminated, COOL DEVICES' "Kirei" may be punching the misogyny button a wee bit too hard.

COOL DEVICES #1 was pretty much the same misogynistic grist Japanime artists have been turning out since CREAM LEMON, as is a good chunk of DEVICES #2. "Kirei," the last, and longest, episode on COOL DEVICES #2, is a different kettle of fish altogether, so pathological in its fear and loathing for women that it manages to work on a level of repugnance uniquely its own.

A synopsis of "Kirei" reads

like a FANTASY ISLAND episode by way of the Marquis de Sade. A pair of young, nubile girls, who'd be assets to any Russ Meyer saga, are enjoying a tropical island holiday when they are abducted by a local, all-male(!) tribe who are more than happy to acquire a new pair of "flowers." Following the rape/enslavement of her older friend, the virginal innocent is then leisurely ravished and deflowered by the tribe's chief, who, having finished with her, gloats, "Now I have seen the true beauty inside you." Having no fur-

ther use for her, he then has her hurled to her death, the ultimate fate of the tribe's female victims. As she free-falls to her doom, the girl has a vision of her friend's spirit rising to comfort her.

The above plot is a barebones breakdown of the truly sick and twisted vibes that "Kirei" puts out. What makes the episode ultra-queasy is its almost wistful attitude toward the impermanence of (femme) flesh. The girls' plight is cynically

juxtaposed with images of flowers and butterflies (the wings of the latter often poetically gooped with semen), these images employed both as glib visual metaphors for the transitory nature of beauty and youth, and for the vicarious (male) pleasure of being free to flit from "flower" to "flower." The episode's hypocrisy is perhaps more squalid than the general rape-fantasy scenario.

Violence against women, sexual or otherwise, has always been a staple of adult anime, from GUY to DEMON BEAST INVASION, and Japan has produced many truly memorably loathsome meditations on the extremely messy melding of Eros and Thanatos. But perhaps the most objectionable sentiment behind "Kirei's" slimy and cynical misogyny is the nasty suggestion that once a woman reaches sexual knowledge of herself, she has no further value, and her innocence following the fall from virginity is then only preserved by killing. Given that female roles in the confines of adult anime are either those of sexual pincushions or succubae (and occasionally both), "Kirei" may not be too far removed from the realm of more grandiloquently (and more pretentious) repellent OVA sagas such as UROT-SUKIDOJI or A.D. POLICE. Its callous crassness, though, is far more insulting than those films, and far cruder, too. This is the type of film where, in rapist-fantasy fashion, the victim must exult in her degradation, writhing in ecstasy as huge, Japanese kanji fill the screen reading out in subtitles: "Oh my God, I'm being raped and enjoying it!"

Terrific. Bring back LA BLUE GIRL.

AFQ

OUT OF JAPAN

It's been hard to find a truly sophisticated adult thriller within the realm of mainstream-friendly anime. At least, until now. Directed by Satoshi Kon, screenwriter of the memorable portmanteau piece *MEMORIES*, and supervised by the legendary Katsuhiko Otomo (*AKIRA*), *PERFECT BLUE* is the story of 21-year-old pop sensa-

ing the scene proves to be a traumatic experience for Mima, watching it is an even greater one for "Mi-maniac," the psychologically troubled fan who runs Mima's unofficial website, *Mima's Place*. Appalled at the sight of his sweet-faced pop idol, "violated, desecrated and soiled," the obsessed fan is apparently driven to murder, taking bloody revenge on Dou-

the public's obsessive (and oppressive) attitude towards the stars it idolizes, the media's fascination with famous flesh and celebrity skin, and the growing number of so-called "stalkers" whose obsessions have either tragically, or deleteriously, affected such public figures as John Lennon, Jodie Foster and, more recently, Madonna and Steven

own psychosis? — begins to close in on her, threatening not only her sanity, but the lives of everyone around her. Graphic (though never gratuitous) scenes of violence and unusually explicit nudity — the one often intercut with the other — add an uncompromising edge to the production, and although a few of the plot twists are signposted, the final revelation is truly shocking, making an immediate second viewing almost essential.

Although *PERFECT BLUE* utilizes many of the camera, lighting and editing techniques fast becoming a staple of the cream of Japanese animation, it is literally impossible to compare this sublime work to any previous anime. Indeed, if any valid comparison is to be made, it must be with the work of Italian *giallo* director Dario Argento (especially *SUSPIRIA* and *THE STENDAHLL SYNDROME*); even the savage, industrial soundtrack recalls Argento's regular music collaborators, Goblin.

Masterfully written, animated, designed, directed and — in the Japanese version, at least — performed, *PERFECT BLUE* is the ideal antidote to the seemingly endless cycle of fantasy, sf and beat-em-ups which dominates the U.S. anime market. Complex, chilling, and utterly convincing, *PERFECT BLUE* will set a new standard for adult animation. It's about time. **APF**

David Hughes

PERFECT BLUE

Manga; 81 mins. Directed by Satoshi Kon; Screenplay by Sadayuki Murai; Supervised by Katsuhiko Otomo. Subtitled version reviewed.



tion Mima Kirigoe, lead singer with the all-girl band Cham. On the advice of her agent and manager, Mima decides to split from the band to pursue a career as an actress, leaving behind a legion of devastated fans whom, she hopes, will realize that Mima's innocent, teen-friendly image could not last forever.

Like many pop stars before her, however, Mima finds it hard to be taken seriously as an actress. After a couple of walk-on parts in forgettable television shows, she reluctantly agrees to shed her girl-next-door image once and for all by appearing in a brutally realistic rape scene in a violent exploitation thriller entitled *Double Bind*. Although film-

ble Bind's screenwriter, and lining up further victims in the film's producer and a photographer whose seminaked shots of Mima have been splashed all over the glossy magazines. All the while, Mima's home page has been receiving mysterious e-mails from someone claiming to be "the real Mima," suggesting that either another fan shares Mi-maniac's sense of betrayal, or that Mima herself is losing her mind...

While few would argue that *PERFECT BLUE* is "ripped from today's headlines," Sadayuki Murai's screenplay (based on the manga by Yoshizaku Takeuchi) has a bracing immediacy, encompassing such issues as the cult of celebrity,

Spielberg. At the same time, *PERFECT BLUE* examines the fleeting nature of fame, the manipulation of young entertainers at the hands of their ruthless agents and managers, and the explosion of fan-produced websites for celebrities of all kinds, most of which are unauthorized, few of them legally removable.

Against this fertile background, the gripping, disturbing and often terrifying story of Mima unfolds. Both viewers and Mima herself are constantly wrong-footed, until neither is sure what is real, what might be taking place in the film-within-a-film *Double Bind*, and what is happening in Mima's own mind as the psychotic fan — or is it her

JINROH

Production IG/Bandai: Subtitled version reviewed.

Directed by Hiroyuki Okiura; Written by Mamoru Oshii, based on his films *THE SCARLET SPECTACLES* (AKAI MEGANE) and *STRAY DOGS*; Character Design/Animation Director: Tetsuya Nishio.

In JINROH, the new drama out of Production IG, the Axis powers have won the war, not that it's done Japan much good. Learning the lesson first taught to Poland, the country that envisioned itself a Pacific empire instead winds up an occupied nation, and this time, the occupier doesn't have a tradition of democracy to impart on its subjects. Set in a "futuristic" '50s where the world spins to a decidedly different political agenda, the drama, scripted by *GHOST IN THE SHELL* auteur Mamoru Oshii and directed by protege Hiroyuki Okiura, is alternate history darkly realized, raising more questions than the producers — in true Oshii fashion — are willing to answer.

Don't expect to see barbed wire and throngs of prisoners being marched off to the "baths," here. Pax Spielberg, this is Japan, with no "Jewish problem" to resolve. In fact, the world, what little we see of it, seems fairly settled and generally prosperous — not much farther, one might imagine, from what Japan was like under American occupation. But that's only a surface appearance. The country of JINROH is wracked by riots, and overrun by occupying forces, the most terrifying of which are

the members of the "Special Unit" — riot-gearred troops who operate with total impunity, free to slaughter in the name of national security. Gas-masked and equipped with ominous red, night-vision goggles, they are part bogeyman and part vicious, visual pun — Lucas' Storm Troopers re-envisioned with a nod towards their historic counterparts and an understanding of the technical reality behind the dehumanizing mask.

It is, in fact, the human behind that mask, and how a system grows that's directed towards the spiritual negation of that humanity, that is the actual, dramatic thrust of JINROH (or JINROH, as hyphenated in the opening credits). Constable Kazuki Fuse, a member of the Special Unit, finds himself in a tenuous position both politically and emotionally when he hesitates in killing a young girl carrying a terrorist bomb. Sent back to the Academy for retraining, he soon finds himself an unwitting catpaw in a drama that swirls around a woman who may or may not be the slain girl's sister, a friend who might be an operative of a

mysterious, shadow organization, and a world where neither allies nor enemies can be trusted in their motives.

If that all sounds a little obscure, it's because, well, it is. Based on a live-action film directed by Oshii, JINROH thrives on its creator's zeal for shrouded narrative. With the terrorist threat abandoned early on, the film soon reveals its true center: a morass of internecine politics, where one man cannot hope to make a difference, and whose participants seem at best to be holding on and hoping that their actions aren't immediately rendered pointless by events they have no way of controlling.

Grim stuff. Directed by Okiura in a style reminiscent of the stylized, hyper-realistic imagery of *GHOST IN THE SHELL* — with a heavy reliance, apparently, on rotoscoped footage — JINROH makes a virtue of its oppressive atmosphere. The protagonists are characterized by their emotional inaccessibility, the settings, even when portrayed in stark daylight, seem shrouded by an atmosphere of doom. A vision of a world

consumed in duplicity, the film spares neither its characters nor its viewers a moment of release.

Which may be a problem. The audience that I viewed JINROH with appeared stunned at the end, as if they all agreed that they'd certainly seen *something*, but could not necessarily say what, nor whether they were completely pleased with the experience. That may be the effect that Okiura and Oshii are after, but the auteurs, as unyielding as their driven, politically ambiguous protagonists, may have done their job too well. It cannot be denied that the imagery of JINROH is impressive, that its narrative presentation — the main storyline being paralleled by a strange, sado-masochistic retelling of *Little Red Riding Hood* that's apparently an Oshii original — is starkly innovative. Whether one can actually pull something of value from it, though, may well depend on what insight emerges upon repeated viewings. As with *GHOST IN THE SHELL*, this is one film that will benefit immensely from a video release. AFQ

Dan Persons

JINROH director Okiura was character designer and animation supervisor on *GHOST IN THE SHELL* (below).



Twenty years ago, when Amuro Rey climbed into the cockpit of the towering mobile armored suit that his father helped design, the teenager unleashed a science fiction phenomenon that has dominated Japanese animation ever since. Occurring in the very first episode of the original MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM television series, that memorable moment would echo throughout the next generation of mecha programs.

SUPERDIMENSIONAL

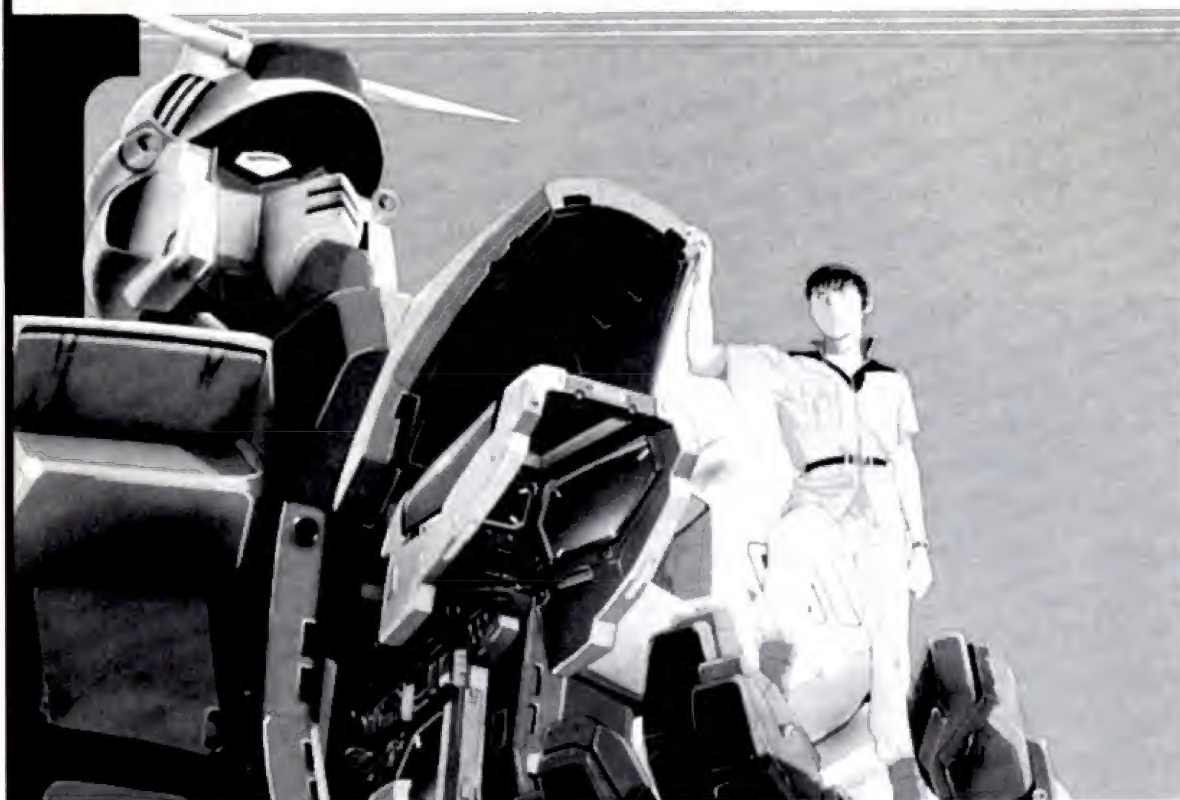
quently clunky and wooden. What may have been serviceable for a '70s TV show pales in comparison to the dynamic, computer-aided animation of today. Still, what the movies may lack in visual punch, they more than make up for in the depth of their overall story and the interplay of their characters.

By the 79th year of the Universal Century, much of humanity has emigrated to huge, floating space colonies called "Sides." Although every Side has its own

dam prototype and repels the rebel attack.

Rey himself is something of a prototype for all succeeding Gundam heroes. His youthful inexperience only partially masks the superior intellect and quick reflexes that mark him as a super-evolved "New Type." Just as "The Force" lent an aura of mysticism to STAR WARS, the New Type concept imbues Gundam with a pseudo-scientific rationale. It also provides Rey with something to angst about for three films. At times, the brooding is a bit much to take, but at least it's punctuated by some very exciting mobile suit battles, the best of

ternate views of the Zeon/Earth Federation struggle. WAR IN THE POCKET tells the story of a little boy who is fascinated by mobile suits, but who quickly learns about the true horrors of war. In STARDUST MEMORY, the Zeons plot revenge with a stolen, nuclear-armed Gundam. Not only do these two direct-to-video series help flesh out the already fascinating future universe, but they're packed with many thrilling animated sequences. Whether it's five-story high mobile suits lumbering through a city or giant space destroyers dropping satellites on the Earth, these videos provide jaw-dropping entertainment.



"Story, character, and action are all here. Too bad we had to wait twenty years for it."

which involve Zeon's own hotshot, New Type pilot Char Aznable.

As the infamous "Red Comet," Aznable is perhaps Gundam's most popular and fascinating character. His father, Zeon Daikun, was killed by the Zabi family, who ironically adopted that name for their rebel government. Fighting incognito, Aznable plots revenge against the Zabis, betraying and killing his superiors whenever possible. Though he and Rey fight on opposite sides of the war, they are really kindred spirits. Unfortunately, the forces of fate, war, and, yes, love, lead to their inevitable climactic confrontation at the end of MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM III.

While MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM 0080: WAR IN THE POCKET and MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM 0083: STARDUST MEMORY, are not sequels in the strictest sense, they offer audiences al-

FORTRESS MACROSS, ARMORED TROOPER VOTOMS, PATLABOR, and even the recent hit EVANGELION can all trace their roots to GUNDAM. These series did not copy the original so much as emulate its successful mix of complex storylines, realistic characterization, and imaginative mechanical designs.

The three theatrical GUNDAM films and two direct-to-video features which Bandai released last fall through its AnimeVillage website provide a useful introduction to this mother-of-all-mecha shows. While the three films contain some new animation, they are actually edited-down compilations of the original TV series. For this reason, the animation — particularly that of the characters — is fre-

unique environment and culture, they are still governed by the Earth Federation. This does not sit well with a group of rebels led by the Zabi family on Side 3. They establish the Duchy of Zeon and launch a war of independence against Earth. The conflict unfolds in a series of sweeping space battles in which Zeon's Zaku mobile suits — heavily-armed, humanoid-shaped suits of armor — prove to be the decisive weapon. At the beginning of MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM MOVIE I, the Federation has just completed the prototype of its own mobile suit, when a pair of Zakus attack the weapons factory on Side 7. In the middle of the battle, Amuro Rey, an inexperienced teenager with an interest in machinery, leaps into the Gun-

In fact, all of Bandai's GUNDAM titles should appeal to the casual and serious science fiction fan alike. What do you want: complex stories, intriguing characters, dazzling action? They're all here. It's too bad we had to wait 20 years to get them.

AFQ

Michael O'Connell

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

AnimeVillage; English dub reviewed.

Directed by Yoshiyuki Tomino; Created by Yoshiyuki Tomino and "Hamime Yagate" (pseudonym for the collaborative effort of animation studio Sunrise, Inc.).

GRUNTMASTERS: THE SLAVING CLASS INVADES PRIME-TIME ANIME

Ten years ago, **THE SIMPSONS** was a launch point. Rival broadcasters took a look at its Nielsen figures, said, "Ohhh, it's about *animation!*" and therewith shot off in all directions, dragging in mainstays like Hanna-Barbera to try and replicate Matt Groening's success. The results were disheartening: **FISH POLICE**, **THE CRITIC**, **FAMILY DOG**, and a belated realization that it took more than cels to captivate the viewing public.

The popularity of **KING OF THE HILL** (short-lived, thanks to an unfortunate change in schedule) laid another point on the map. Connected with **THE SIMPSONS**, it formed a line that other networks took for a signpost to victory. "Ohhh," they said. "it's about animation about the *working class*." Now more directed, the nets again cranked up their idea machines, aiming them towards trying to capture the blue-collar vibe. Already rumored is a series based on Kevin Smith's **CLERKS**; meanwhile, three recent efforts — two from the network that started it all, one from a web dying for *any* bump in its viewer numbers — indicate that the current raft of knock-offs are no more set on a road to prosperity than the one traveled ten years ago.

An animated series based on **DILBERT**, the Scott Adams comic strip about life in the stultifying realms of contemporary, corporate America, had to be a no-brainer for the suits at UPN. Adams, having started out a working stiff himself, was remarkably adept at capturing an insider's-eye-view of managerial idiocy in all its dis-

sembling, evasive, abusive glory, and delivering it with a daily punch line. All that had to be done was to port the atmosphere of desperation and futility to the screen and, presto, an edgy, weekly half-hour would be born.

Or maybe not. It's hard to pin exactly what's so unsatisfying about **DILBERT: THE ANIMATED SERIES**. It could be that the attempt to generalize the material in order to make it more accessible to a mass audience has resulted in a sacrifice of the damning specificity that

no impact now.

There's no such ambivalence about Fox's **THE FAMILY GUY**: it's just plain lousy. Having paradoxically won the coveted time-slot after **THE SIMPSONS** over such worthier candidates as **KING OF THE HILL** and **THE P.J.'S**, the show plays like a reactionary crossing of Adams and Groening, all the way down to a replication of **THE SIMPSONS'** fouled home-life, and a splitting of **DILBERT's** megalomaniacal Dogbert into a genius baby and a cynical, talking dog.



THE P.J.'S

gave the comic strip its biting humor. It could be that Dilbert himself is such a bland character — he rarely seems to be more than a spectator to the events going on around him, even when he's the engine driving the story — that the audience can find no empathy with him. Maybe it's just that, strung out to a half-hour, the absurdities and irritations that Adams so precisely mapped in print just aren't very funny. Whatever the case, you can recognize the stuff you laughed at when you opened up the daily paper, and wonder why it has

The generic nature of the title is carried forward to the bland, indistinctive artwork, and plotlines that wouldn't have passed muster on **SHE'S THE SHERIFF**. Furthering the suspicion that the whole mess is an attempt to groom a **SIMPSONS** successor now that that series may be seeing the end of its run, the producers have larded the half-hour with enough tangential gags (when someone offhandedly mentions Kool-Aid, you know, in the split second before it actually happens, that the product's anthropomorphized spokesperson will burst through a

wall, to no humorous effect) to make you wonder if Fox considers those with attention deficit disorder a key demographic.

Even without **FAMILY GUY** to compare it to, **THE P.J.'S** — about life in the projects as seen through the eyes of the building's cantankerous, but essentially good-hearted, super — is still pretty damn funny. The show has caught flack from such luminaries as Spike Lee and numerous black groups for what some see as taking too jokey an approach to the very real problems facing black Americans, but with Eddie Murphy backing the project (and providing the voice for lead super Thurgood Stubbs), and the producing slots filled by some of the people previously responsible for **IN LIVING COLOR**, what were they expecting? Yes, the ancillary characters at present show no greater depth than what you'd find in your typical **SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE** sketch (one resident — voodoo priestess, Haiti Lady — complains that

her boyfriend sees her, "only for the hex"), but with the series already okayed for another 22 episodes, there's hope that the empathy granted to Stubbs and missus will spread to the rest of the cast. And besides, when a show offers up such pointed moments as one where Stubbs, desperate to summon the police, realizes that the only way to catch a cop's attention is to run through the streets carrying a television, that's a connection to a human truth that all the talking dogs in the world can't deliver.

AFQ

Dan Persons

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

I came across your premiere issue of *AnimeFantastique* today. I picked it up, and glanced down at the cover with THE PRINCE OF EGYPT [1:1 — Some copies had THE IRRESPONSIBLE CAPTAIN TYLOR on the cover]. In amazement, I glanced back up at the title — yes, it does say “Anime.” I looked back down at the cover — it still wasn’t anime. Being your premiere issue and having an article on the excellent CAPTAIN TYLOR, I still bought it despite my reservations.

A magazine devoted to both anime and American animation, while an original idea, is one I expect to fail. On the surface, one could say it is all animation, so let’s lump it together. But unfortunately, we are really talking two very different genres, and two very different audiences. I know about a dozen anime fans — not one of which has the slightest interest in American animation, including myself. I also know two American animation fans — neither which like anime. I have never known anyone who likes both. In fact, anime fans are almost without exception *insulted* by American animation, and American animation fans just don’t “get” anime.

I would love to see a mainstream, widely-available anime magazine on the market — but *AnimeFantastique* is not it. Either put both feet into anime, or both into American animation — I guarantee you won’t please either genres by walking the line in between.

Mark D. Hansen
mdh@execpc.com

[“Never known anyone who likes both?” Avoid broad generalizations, Mark. You now know me, and I love animation of all forms. So do many of AFQ’s writers, and many of my friends (an admittedly overlapping group).

Your letter, though, strikes right at the heart of the controversy as to what type of animation should be called “anime.” Should birthplace be the sole determining factor? Or should the distinction be made based on a set of distinctive characteristics found in the best of anime? If the former, then, yes, you’re right, AFQ deserves the righteous in-

dignation of anime fans everywhere. But if riveting stories, bold visuals, and engaging characters are at the true heart of anime, then we hold that PRINCE OF EGYPT is more anime than a number of titles coming from across the Pacific. We certainly don’t intend to offend fans — we need all the goodwill (and, ahem, discretionary income) we can muster. But if the tastes of all in your circle are so exclusive that they reject without reflection anything that dares hint at the full diversity of this innovative art form, we might suggest you expand your acquaintances to those who are more open-minded. - DP]

THE NEW WORLD

In the inaugural issue of AFQ, The Right Stuf International’s Jeff Thompson relates the tale of an American cable group rejecting a children’s Japanese series they had bought because they thought American children wouldn’t understand the cultural differences in the show [1:1:28: *The Right Stuf International*]. If true, they made a big mistake; children exhibit a great ability to accept differences, perhaps partly because they don’t fully know what is “normal” in their own culture yet. (People sleep on the floor? They eat with little sticks? So what? You ever see the Teletubbies? That’s weird.)

It may be that adults are catching up to children. With more non-Europeans making up the American public, and even more of us European Americans thirsting for things that aren’t as formulaic as the usual Hollywood product, there is a growing market for foreign and independent fare to teach and entertain us. I look forward to more interviews with the Japanese (or Korean, or whatever) creators themselves instead of their Western distributors.

I hope the market for world media welcomes AFQ itself; I certainly do. Best wishes with the magazine.

John Zipperer
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[Thanks for the good thoughts, John. Establishing contact with overseas animators — many of

whom do not speak one word of English and a number of whom are quite startled at the level of enthusiasm with which their work is greeted overseas — has turned out to be the hardest part of this job. Rest assured that we will always expend the greatest effort towards bringing you authoritative voices on the films we cover, whether those voices are western or eastern. - DP]

DRAGONBALL Z: LOST IN TRANSLATION?

FUNimation has to stop messing up DRAGONBALL Z! They are making too much of a kid’s show. If you compare an episode of DRAGONBALL or DRAGONBALL Z from Japan to it’s American version, you will see how different it is. They take out 90% of the violence, and most of the dialog is changed. That wouldn’t be so bad if you could buy unedited versions, but the tapes turn out to be the same TV episodes. Why can’t they make unedited versions for the older audience?

If anyone wants more info

on what’s missing in the American DRAGONBALL, go to <http://www.goes.com/~dbzinfo/noframes.html>. You can also learn how to support unedited Dragonball.

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[The website is a nice, personal fan page with numerous frame grabs of scenes missing from the domestic version of the show. We wonder, though, how many industry converts they’ll win over with illos of DRAGONBALL Z characters giving Haim Saban the finger. - DP]

CORRECTION

In the article on NEON GENESIS EVANGELION [1:2:32] Rod Peters was mistakenly identified as A.D. Vision’s president. He is actually its head of media relations.

The review of THE RUGRATS MOVIE [1:2:59] was written by Mitch Persons.

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A SENSE OF WABI-SABI

SCOTT C.
MAURIELLO

Japanese animation has always held a certain allure and fascination for Americans. Originally, I wanted to discuss the reasons Japanese animation has become the incredible industry in America it is today, and how a *gaijin* from Queens, New York was able to create a chain of stores that successfully and exclusively sell Japanese Animation in the U.S. But a strange thought came to me: to explain the phenomenon, I need also to explain something that I like to refer to as “*Wabi-sabi* and Anime.” (And, no, I’m not referring to wasabi, the spicy Japanese mustard eaten with sushi.)

Wabi-sabi is an ancient Japanese aesthetic. It’s a way of feeling, a perception of something beautiful and soft, hard and complicated. It’s especially difficult to put into English, but I guess the best way to illustrate it is to relate how I personally found out about it. I was in Kyoto last year with a very dear friend of mine, who is very Japanese and very intuitive in the matters of Cultural Japanese aesthetics, what some refer to as the “Vanishing Ancient Japan.” It was during a particularly heavy rainstorm that we took shelter in one of the many beautiful temples in Kyoto. While there, I was struck with a strange feeling. It was a presence...almost a smell in the air of something very old and ancient, but at the same time familiar. As I explained this to my friend, she told me that what I was experiencing was probably *wabi-sabi*. I continued to press my friend

for some sort of explanation of the term, but she could not explain it further. Strangely enough, that inability to describe the sensation is how I was finally able to understand it.

You’re probably asking yourself: “What does this have to do with Japanese animation and manga?” Well, through my many travels to Japan and by selling anime to many energetic fans, I’ve come to understand that it’s not only the animation that

read Japanese, and have never been to Japan. These fans are able to do this because Japanese animation has the ability to transcend any linguistic, geographic, or social barrier which other mediums of cultural exchange would have difficulty overcoming.

I witnessed a vivid demonstration of this when I saw *THE PRINCESS MONONOKE* in Japan. I sat in a theater made up of adults, and there were moments of

mental level.

In the final analysis, anime, like Japan, is great but also delicate; beautiful, but extremely intense; alien, and at the same time familiar. And, like Japan, it can be at once intimidating and subtle. That is what people who are not from Japan respond to without realizing it. Anime is Japan, and the reactions to it are felt on many levels. It’s Japanese food, Japanese imagery, Japanese lettering — the whole of a

culture. It is this uniquely Japanese sense of style and aesthetic that sets it apart from most other animation around the world. Other countries and other animation studios may make attempts to mimic and repackage this aesthetic, but they will never be able to capture the true essence of its very individual style. I think, judging by the ever-growing popularity of anime and manga around the world, we will see it continue to become an increasingly dominant force in the entertainment industry. I’ll say here what I’ve said to the Japanese press

and others: I believe anime and manga are, if not the last great exports from Japan this century, certainly some of the most important. That judgement will only be answered by the passage of time, and through the continued innovations of Japanese animators. In the meantime, it is a vital bridge between our cultures. **AFQ**



BEAUTY IN OPPOSITION: Is this iconic image from *MONONOKE*, outwardly savage yet actually the result of an act of mercy, the very heart of *wabi-sabi*?

they love, but also Japan and its culture, a culture with which anime and manga is so very saturated. Many people who gravitate toward this material seem, consciously or not, to have a desire to understand more about Japan and the nuances of its people. Many fans are able to subliminally put themselves into a Japanese mindset, and understand complicated aspects of Japanese culture and customs through watching Japanese animation, even though many of them don’t speak or

such absolute silence, you could hear a pin drop — it was as if everything else in the world was still and quiet except for Miyazaki’s amazing, moving tapestry on the screen. Some time later, and half a world away at my store, Anime Crash, we were hosting a screening of segments from *MONONOKE*. Once again the room was packed, and once again... you could hear a pin drop. The people responded identically. What both audiences really responded to in my eyes was *wabi-sabi* on its most ele-

Scott C. Mauriello is the owner and managing director of Crash Entertainment, a distributor of Asian entertainment and the company behind the Anime Crash stores.

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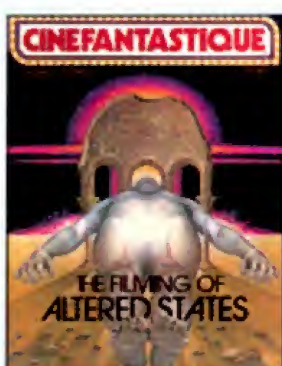
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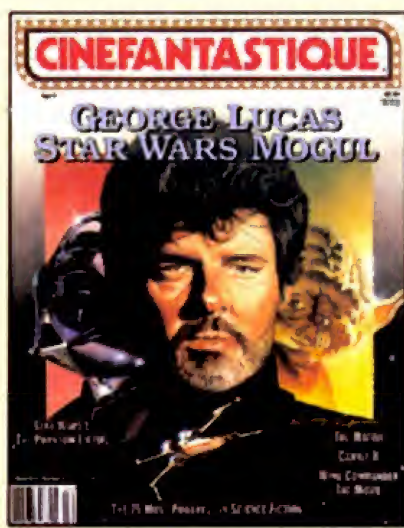
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